

AN IDYL
SOME SERMONS
AND
A SONG
by
REV. OWEN A. HILL, S. J.



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**AN IDYL, SOME SERMONS
AND A SONG**

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AN IDYL SOME SERMONS AND A SONG

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die 8 Septembris, 1915



TO·HER
WHO·GAVE·ME
NEXT·PLACE·TO·GOD
IN·HER·THOUGHTS
MY·MOTHER



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**AN IDYL, SOME SERMONS
AND A SONG**



Alexis and Mercedes

Deep in the tangled growth of world-old oaks,
Where twigs, that ages erst untrodden lay,
Crackled and smote his soul with lonesome songs;
Beside a spring, that rippled praise to God
The third morn of the universe's birth,
Nor ever yet had broke thanksgiving's hymn,
Alexis watched the twilight streak the west,
And raise red riot in a leaden sky
With arrow beams of an uneasy sun
Just setting on the hermit's thirtieth year.
There is a melancholy in the death
Of each departing day, that presses light
The myriad hearts of men, for that they see,
Or think they see, at eve the morrow's east
Dance with the splendor of the risen king,
Who slept against the night. Not so the sick,
Who scarce can hope five heavy breaths to draw.
These dread the dark, impatient cry the dawn,
To travel to the land of mystery,
Their path lit by the lamp God set in Heaven.
For death, like other beasts men reckon foes,

Alexis and Mercedes

Assumes an aspect void of half his dread,
When, stripped of night time's terror by the light,
He bares his whole complexion to their gaze,
And loud proclaims his powerlessness to harm.
Not so the monk, who knows his heart-roots smit,
And sits him down some eve to watch calm peace
Settle upon the head of what should be
The herald of those ten kind years, that fleck
The gold of youth with iron gray of prime.
Should be; but, lo! by pious exercise
And healthful draughts of prayer, her fount of youth,
His soul has fast outgrown the clayey gyves
Of gaoler body, and contemplates flight
To climes more genial than this murky home.
From out his eyes Alexis never cleared
The kindly dreadful image on them spread
What time they rose no higher than the ground,
Or swept a lower plane where God walked not.
Mayhap, nay surely, Heaven worked its will,
And let the rebel prince inviting snares
On his horizon cast, to win him back,
Or fright him to the Saviour's open side,
The gateway to God's heart. So drives the storm
A too bold fledgling to its mother's wing.
Because it marked an epoch in his life,
This day was with such shadows overcast.
For epoch-days our dull remembrance whet,

Alexis and Mercedes

And vivify the dust, we thought as dead
As whom Elisha's bones of old made quick.
He watched the glow-worm glimmer in the grass
From early morn. He mourned another life,
When that the angry sun, descending hot,
O'erwhelmed with blinding gloom her lesser light.
Then all day long sat near the singing spring,
His fingers in his hair, or veil-wise held
Between him and the glare of saucy rays,
That peered anon into his swimming eyes.
Nigh blinded by the burning penance drops,
That worked a sadder havoc in his sight
Than rounded circle of a hundred years,
He looked before, behind, to right and left;
Like Moses, high above the vales of Moab,
On Nebo's summit, dashing back the tears,
That dimmed the outlines of his soul's desire,
The Promised Land, his follies forfeited.
He thought him of the dream he fashioned once,
To treasure in his fancy double locked,
Till grace broke through, and tore to mocking shreds
The mimic idol of his heart's young love.

Some twenty years agoe his father's home
Lay at the head of cedar avenues,
That wound through level sweeps of clover heads
And shafted timothy, field flowers between.

Alexis and Mercedes

There life was love, and love derived its life
From amorous breezes of his garden South.
The pebbles and the shells in miniature,
With nice precision o'er the driveway spread,
Full oft reëchoed noise of carriage wheels;
And rolled this way and that, as rolled they once,
When pavement for the shouting waves at play
On shore of distant sea. Then he, the heir
Of teeming acres, stood upon the porch,
Ornate with columns carved in classic Greece.
These more became a thousandfold this shrine,
To kindlier worship of way-weary guest,
And cult of age-old friendships dedicate,
Than temple of the goddess, noisome proud
And marble hearted, that they guarded once.
He stood, and welcomed with a tell-tale smile,
Pursuant of love's roses in his cheeks,
A mother and her daughter, beauty's queens.
As fair the mother as when braids of hair,
Now tied in sober knot of matronhood,
Caressed her shoulders, like the laughing light
Of golden tresses, barring robber eyes
From sacrilegious theft of treasures hid
Beneath the daughter's wealth of waving curls.
One age were they, the heir of Evergreen
And this sweet scion of a godly pair,
That lived to keep the lamp of faith clean trimmed.

Alexis and Mercedes

Their neighbors, all forgetful of the hand
That sprinkled thick Virginia's sacred soil
With gifts as rare as favored Eden knew,
The holy flame let flicker first, and die.
It lit their braver fathers to the rack,
It mocked the brands of countrymen misled,
And made men valiant martyrs to the truth.
We never cling so close to cherished goods,
As when anear the cavalcade of dearth;
We never covet breath so tight amain,
Or hug our heart to make it bind and loose
The crimson stream of life, as when beside
The sable casket, that imprisons fast
What yesterday familiar laughed and talked,
A silent clod to-day, except for sounds
That leap to us across death's vaporous chasm.
And so the Sissons, conscious of what wealth
The nearer smile of God communicates
To them that pledge and keep their troth with Him,
Had held the priceless jewel of their faith.
They pitied misers who for paltry gain,
Or friendships prompted by the petty sneers
Of addle-heads for high observances,
Went out from fold, that God had hedged about,
To tents of sin and devils' synagogues.
They scourged these cringing paupers, slaves to sense,
With bitter memories of what halcyon days

Alexis and Mercedes

Had taken wing that winter long ago,
When faith, the message-bird from earth to Heaven,
Took flight, and never after sped return,
Interstices to fill with melody.
The daughter borrowed from her mother's grace
A superhuman beauty, that perforce
Had dragged a world to worship at its feet,
If pillared on the universe's height.
The bluff old features of her father's face,
As sweetly open as the broadening fields,
Impressions left where all too rounded lines
Had wrought a work with over-niceness spoilt.
E'en yet the gray-haired squires and solemn wigs
In all the county reminiscent fell,
To talk of gentle Amy's love for Hugh,
When that the church bells wedding carols rang,
When roads were noisy with the whir of wheels,
And sound of servants journeying to and fro,
Intent on welding some two hearts to one.
Old men remembered how they thought it base
And worse than sacrilege, to steal away
One glance from eyes they almost coveted,
Whose limpid depths they knew belonged to Hugh.
And matrons, staidier now than then, recalled
With what decorum they half hid their smiles,
When etiquette or function of the hour
Forced them to linger close to Amy's shrine.

Alexis and Mercedes

When last the man, who pushed God's interests
Among the believing few that clave to God,
Had, reënacting Cana, blest with wine
Of Heaven's benediction other two,
As favored as the trusting hosts of eld,
Who rested Christ that day He took farewell
Of Mary's roof, to walk three years to death,
Their neighbors welled the sigh relief exacts.
Like him, who once, because his will was right,
Fought fast the demon greed, that pinched him hard
To lay his fingers on a brother's wealth,
And blessed the hap that drove him seas across,
And rooted up temptation by the roots.
E'en so, when sacramental rite had made
Him hers and her irrevocably his,
They who half dreaded their own weaker selves,
And looked about, not knowing when they'd steal,
Breathed easier, and were winners by their loss.
Full soon a boy, whose every lineament,
Close-curved hair, and chin, and flashing eyes,
Bespoke the soldier, prattled evenings through.
And then another, whose uncertain health
Endeared him to the mother; for her love
Could waste itself with lavish largess-care,
And still excuses find for saying nay
To nature's clamor 'gainst unceasing wrongs.
A girl came next, and then another boy.

Alexis and Mercedes

These two scarce lived to lisp infantile thanks
To parent benefactors, who had nursed
Them unto God, and sealed their fronts with sign,
At which the golden gates of Heaven roll back,
To let the favored pilgrim into rest.
Two little mounds without the doorway stood,
Within the acre, sacred to the dead,
Engirdled round by walls of rough-hewn rock.
The mother called them stepping-stones to peace;
So close she felt, when kneeling there in prayer,
To bliss eternal and God's nearer smile.
Our hearts are fashioned out of many strings,
So well attuned each echoes unto each,
To mercifully fill all aching voids;
And every life is one unbroken song.
Religion's fairy hands roam though the chords,
And strive to stay the mad and angry sweeps
Of headlong passion. When at times some strand,
Too worn to meet the pressure death exerts,
Asunder snaps, and leaves a gap too wide,
She seldom mends the string. 'Twere wrong to rob
The soul of memories, dearer thus than whole.
She merely modulates the remnant threads,
And, like the tone of sad-tongued kettle-drum,
Moans to the rest, and harmonizes all.
And so religion was at work within
This father's and this mother's smitten hearts,

Alexis and Mercedes

From winter morn they moved aside the snow,
To hide their sacrifice against the time,
When God, the universal reckoner,
To each restores his own and gifts besides.
But lo! her task was scarce begun, when woes,
More dismal than their predecessors grim,
Sore tried her patience, and nigh dashed her hopes.
For war had left its furrows in the land,
And once a bearded demon from the North
Had swaggered past at head of straggler thieves,
On booty more than manly battle bent;
Confounding greed with sacred valor's cause,
And war with pillage. From her suppliant hands
He tore the mother's son. Ten years of care,
So sedulous it tempered errant winds,
And bent descending suns to harmlessness,
Had reared in either cheek the rose of health,
And liveness poured into his rounded limbs,
Which, were it not enwrought by slow degrees
Of time, had surely been miraculous.
He stole the boy, and left disconsolate
Two hearts, that never wronged a kindred heart.
He made the pathway rough and dark for feet
That stepped one side to let a beetle live.
The while they lightened grief with comfort tears,
Their soldier lad, with all the fervid heats
Of fifteen summers in his tingling blood,

Alexis and Mercedes

Tore from beneath the painted warrior frown
Of ancestor, who helped at Yorktown drive
The British from our shores, an arquebuse.
This brown with rust, and silent now for years,
He took, and strapped it with precision nice
To shoulders, all unused to heavier weight
Than gentle lying mother's hands at eve,
When, ere she tucked the corners of his cot,
She stooped to press upon his thirsty cheek
A kiss, the harbinger of angel dreams.
Accoutred thus, he scorned the wooden gun
With which, on holidays this way and that
Among log-jointed cabin homes of slaves,
He led to mimic war mock solemn ranks
Of grinning darkey boys. Then, unawares,
Slipped past the room of grief through fields aglint
With furtive beams of rising harvest-moon.
He reached the ford, where scouting men in gray
Lay close, to dog the heels of them that sacked
And plundered, worse, and violated homes
Without defenders, save weak women and white hairs,
Secure defence in days when lances rode
Abroad, to let the angry light consume
What churls dared ladyhood or age insult.
These hailed the lad aloud, with cheery shout;
And one, the captain of the rest, half thought
He saw the babe he left long years ago,

Astride the knee of her he loved as life,
But less than tearful country. Off each cheek
He dried the damp night-dews, and wrapped him warm
In folds of army blanket. First, he pieced
The boy's unwilling story, ere he slept.
With voice as winning as he could command,
He prayed him home return, and spare his life
To parents, who would certain fall and die,
Bereft of every prop to lean upon.
Vainly the captain spoke. Sleep seized the boy,
And sundered quite the broken speech he wove,
"I want my Harold, want to rescue him,
And fight the ugly brutes, that——" Here he ceased.
All through the night by turns he talked and strove,
And wildly tossed his arms, as who in sleep
Beats off a hundred foes, that seek his life
With eyes of fire and hornéd hands of beasts.
The night had nearly run its course,
And ready made to greet from western heights
Pursuant dawn. The twain, preoccupied
With grievous bodings of the young boy's fate,
Had noted not the elder's going out.
Till last the mother, roused from lethargy,
Let fall the tear-wet hand she held in hers,
And made as if to climb the nursery stair,
To summon him she thought secure in sleep.
Then spoke the father, "Nay, let him enjoy

Oblivion's mercy. Would we, too, could seal
Our eyes to things of sense, till Harold came.
For waking ill becomes the nights ahead
And days, whose gloom meridian sun
As little pierces as the waning moon
A storm-swept sky. Come, rest you yet a while.
'Twill soon be morn. Mayhap kind nature's hand,
When through the window of his room she steals,
And bids him grapple with a sorrow new,
Will not so rudely shock the boy we love."
Then she obeying knelt beside her spouse.
And on the woman's sobs, the man's firm prayer,
A deeper stillness fell; till God walked in,
Unseen but felt, and vigil kept with them.
At length the longed for light strode through the room.
They strained their ears to catch the noise o'erhead
Of pattering naked feet; but listed vain.
No footfall answered echoes of their hearts.
The hall was still. Instead, they heard the roar
Of musketry without, and guessed the worst.
For when the dawn made foes discernible,
The coward caitiffs wheeled about, and sharp
Upon the scattered sentries at the ford
Poured leaden death. Then helter-skelter ran,
At sound of martial music braying near.
The mother with a start dashed back her tears,
And hurried straight to chamber damask-hung,

Alexis and Mercedes

That hideous grief had never yet profaned.
Then swooned as dead upon the couch.
O God, thy ways are strange, and faith alone
Can trace among the sands of desert sorrow
The passage of thy blood-empurpled feet.
But dimly; for the torch of faith, though strong
And penetrating as a hundred suns,
Is darkness to enfleshéd mind of man.
So midday splendor blinds the bird of night.
And from fulfilment faith is farther off
Than distant hope, who patient stands between
Her sister and love's pinnacle, where men
Can see, enjoy, and taste how sweet God is.
We pardon then, and trust that Heaven looks light
Upon such momentary fits of doubt
As robbed this stricken parent of her limbs,
And smote her weak as smites despair the fool,
For whom no God save idolled self exists.
Hers was a rude awakening in sooth.
The smoke and powder-weighted mist of war
Had hardly lifted from the face of morn,
When up the hill, and from the water's edge,
Four men, detailed as guard funereal,
With studied firmness, that the death spell lends
To over-weakened bodies, stood without.
These bade the master forth to claim his dead.
They told with sobs how in the jaws of death

Alexis and Mercedes

The fondly brave young lad from cover rushed
Toward Harold, whom he saw far off and hailed.
But straight a Minié ball crashed through his heart.
The arquebuse and straps fell at his feet.
He backward tossed and grasped the piece in death.
Then came a lull. The tide of victory turned,
And veterans knelt to catch youth's dying words.
But so unused their ears to aught save oaths
And ribald of the camp, they little kept.
One only man, with some remembrance left
Of priest, who stroked his raven locks when young,
Had noted sharp the prayer. So much, alas!
It minded him of grace's earlier hours,
When angel keeper folded 'round him wings,
And leaned betimes to hear him lisp the same.
"Death came," he said, "while yet his eyes were fixed
Upon a medal fluttering at his breast;
And life went out with pity hand in hand.
The soul and body, ere they parted quite,
Came crowding to his lips, and framed the words,
'My Jesus, mercy!' Peace more sweet be his,
Than all the sorrow-honeyed thoughts, he woke
Within sin-stained me! And boys, to-night
Mark Murphy travels back to where he met
The monster of his life, and strayed with wrong
Into the woods that skirt the narrow path."
Nor ever yet died saint, but that some heart,

Alexis and Mercedes

Buried in sin, was resurrected whole;
The one true miracle of life in death.
Jump with the word he swore Mark Murphy turned,
And ever after welcomed on his knees
Approaching dawn, and kneeling took farewell
Of days rich freighted with the balm of Heaven.
Then, when with Lee he laid his musket down
And journeyed home with scars and worshipped rags,
He beat the demon out, to make his heart
A wayside shrine for God and holy thoughts.
And after, year by year, as pilgrim lone,
On each recurrent anniversary,
He bolted tight the jarring wheels of trade,
And bent his steps to where the mounded turf
Concealed the relics of his patron saint,
The boy in gray, whose going out had marked
A crisis era in his upward path.
Devotions duly paid, he always stooped
To kiss again the coffin-lid of clay,
Arrange the flowers, and cross the stars and bars
Of humbled battle flag, appealing still
To a hurt people's pride. Ere bivouac drum
Announced the close of day, and bade tired limbs
Provision make on slumbrous tufts of grass
Against fatigue, an army clomb the hill,
And paid him honors due the dead of war.
Virginia drooped her flags, camp-wrinkled cheeks,

Alexis and Mercedes

When on the morrow word to march was passed,
With sorrow's tribute glistened in the sun.

Another scene was done. The father's mind,
A prey to thoughts conflictive, hardly knew
Whether to weep the double loss, that snapped
Whatever links had bound him to his kind,
Or open wide his soul to motions proudly glad,
Bestirred by halo, settled on the head
Of his own flesh and blood, asleep with fame.
At length agreed to nurse a precious grief,
And patient bide the time when conscious God
Would dry his eyes, and lead in smiling peace.
The mother, all too frail to stem the tide
Of anguish flood, wept copious tears the while.
Till after-comfort, lured by earnest prayer,
Assuaged her grief, and blunted quite the edge
Of tearing doubt, that ever as a thorn
Kept pricking sharp her quivering heart.
Entombed within, the wanderer, dead or quick,
She knew not, lay. And haply angel gleams
Of her boy saint pierced through the mist of morns,
The dews of eve, knelt at her soldier's grave,
And poured around rays of consoling hope.
Thus matters stood for nigh three heavy years.
Far in the North with files interminate
The streets were choked. The surging air was rent

Alexis and Mercedes

With loud huzzas, the thanks a grateful people paid
To dust-stained veterans, homeward bent at last,
With victory in their hands, and in their breasts
A longing for the hearths, that years ago
They turned their backs upon. My queen, the South,
Saw other scenes; and all the war-swept land
Below Potomac's nether bank was still.
Men in whose souls were burned the featured pangs
Of helpless courage, resident in mien
Of their heart-broken chief that day he leaned
Upon his sword to nod the ranks farewell,
Gleaned sad behind the greedy scythes of war,
And strove to plenty resurrect from death.
And ever, as they reaped or ploughed, they hummed
What broken echoes came to them across
The trampled waste from bivouac hush or fight,
The songs that late as this exert a spell
Upon the blood within their grandsons' veins.
Or halloed at the steeds, that prouder stepped
And higher held their heads, where trumpets blared
And cannon smote the hills about death-glens.
At fall of day each told the furrows home,
To taste again the humble fare, prepared
By her soft hands, whose dainty touch had ne'er
Ensweetened meal, partaken of in camp.
Then on the open porch, above the rose,
The berry bush, and stunted sassafras,

Alexis and Mercedes

They talked night's morning through. She mostly
heard.

For pools of blood and gaping wounds, through which
The messenger of fate steals in and out,
Will long as time attentive pity claim
From tender woman's soul. And ages link
For mystic reasons, hid from student thought
But open secrets to the unreasoning heart,
The timid fair with rough, bewhiskered brave.
And Lee, who led to death half of their life,
Remains a benediction on the lips
Of loyal women in the widowed South;
Their king of men, so strong he hardly lost
Where might omnipotent alone could win;
So lionlike he bared his front to odds
That stifled hope in less courageous breasts.
Thus fared their neighbors round. The Sissons felt
Remembrance of the lost boy and the dead
Fade into wheeling depths of misty gloom,
Where sorrow executes herself at last,
And joy springs from her dust. Time worked its will,
And God in kindness stooped to heal the wounds
Love made, to let a higher love flow in.
Mercedes came in answer to their prayers,
What time approaching age forbade them hope.
The light within her liquid eyes that fed
The rose beneath, as summer sun and dew,

Alexis and Mercedes

Bespoke the Maker's pleasure. Year and year
Developed traits, some hidden hints of which
The dormant hours of babyhood betrayed.
Till all the graces of ten summers' growth
Conspired to mould a being, so far removed
From things that loiter in this vestibule
Between the sin-made hell of ugliness
And beauty's realms, the birthright once of man,
That death, at loss to spell the branded curse
Of primal fall, might hesitate to touch.
Such was Mercedes, when she first began
To visit Evergreen, Alexis' home,
Set at the head of cedar avenues;
And he the heir to all the wide estate,
To boyhood what his only comrade was
To lovely girlhood, waved a welcome smile,
And trembling, ushered past the swinging doors
This woman fair, this daughter fairer still.
The while their mothers on the ivied porch,
Beneath the coolness, wore the morning out
With talk of this, and that, and neighbor chat,
Their younger selves upon the moss-soft grass,
That carpeted the lawn, disported glad.
They lent the perfume of their voices, sweet
With honeyed innocence, to vagrant airs;
Or sat, and with mock soberness of age
Confided hopes hid in the folds of time;

Alexis and Mercedes

Hopes free as Paradise from fear, and rimmed
Around with lustre from the halo-light,
Their guardian angels must have fingered oft,
When both lay wrapped in solitude and sleep.
Anon they wandered farther, past the edge
Of meadow, skirted with the shadows, cast
By leafage clinging to the forest oaks,
Pausing a while to nosegays each for each
Pluck from the tufted stalks of daisy bloom.
So close their heads together row on row,
These seemed a pathway for the butterflies,
Too tired to cleave the pollen-freighted air;
Or cherubs eyed and winged, to peer across
The battlement of Heaven. Within the wood
They made descent on towns of violets.
Emerged again from dark and damp, their hands
All teeming with the levied tax of war,
They played at win and lose. They hardly guessed,
As purple head on head beneath each tug,
Sportively vicious, tumbled to the grass
From linked stems, that, win or lose, each won
Invariably the wish contended for.
Then sudden came the mother's hurried call,
To summon home the girl, forgetful quite
That time's too rapid wing in noiseless flight
Keeps pace with rounded orbs, which worlds away
Wheel at a rate so reeling quick that minds

Alexis and Mercedes

Grow tired to think of it. Once, only once,
They lingered till the echoes lost themselves
Deep in the wooded alleys. Where they stood,
In patch of intermingled light and shade,
He stooped to cull a lonely buttercup;
And trembling at his bravery, did a thing
He never after dared. For smoothing back
Her wayward wealth of curls, with t'other hand
He held the flower within the magic round
Of her sweet breath, and watched the golden sun
Its petals kissed upon her dimpled chin.

So sped the days. And each returning year
Had these for playmates, till a sterner sense
Of duty stirred within their parents' breasts,
And roused their sleeping wits to serious thought
Of the dull dearth, from which two growing minds
Must needs provision make for jousts ahead.
For learning is the lance that wins fair fame,
And contact with the oddities of life
Is wizard strength that nerves the glaivéd hand.
In spite of pain, attendant on the loss
Of light at home their going out entailed,
In council 'twas agreed to send them North,
To where twin temples, dedicate to God
And higher education, crowned the tops
Of neighboring hills. Their years were now fifteen,

Alexis and Mercedes

And swords of flame had hitherto kept guard
At entrance to the Eden where they played,
And let no serpent in. Nor ever yet
Did sin across the grass they romped upon
Drag its slow length of slime. A vision they,
That somewhere in a lifetime sweeps the path
Of men surrendered to their baser selves,
A grace to lift sin's slaves from servitude;
In mien and favor like the splendid sight
Some guardian angel, seated at the crib
Of slumbering infant, sees in spirit dreams.
And so they journeyed from the little world,
That bounded all their knowledge, past the marts
Of avaricious trade, and often walked
Within a stone's throw of the shambles dread,
Where souls immortal fell down dead for gain.
At length, their travels at an end, they said
Their last farewells beneath the ivy arch
That spanned the gateway to the college grounds.
Then went their different ways, to meet again
When summer back returned let loose the hives
Of hearts, athirst for flowery fields at home.
These spells of rest, wedged in between the months
Of dreary work, were always welcomest,
Because renewals of the peaceful time,
When all the year was one long holiday,
And idle thinking was their single task.

Alexis and Mercedes

Insensibly a change their manners touched.
The lawn was laid with grasses still as green
As when they chased each other to and fro,
The birds abush rehearsed the same sweet songs;
And yet, somehow, they hated to confess,
Their eyes were other, when they chanced to meet.
A coy demureness had succeeded to
What old-time candor laughed beneath the lids;
Emotions close akin to harsh restraint
Possessed them when they ventured to converse;
They dealt out piece by piece the golden store
Of coin mind-minted; yea, and miser like,
They hid away some thoughts, and secrets had.
But being children, they could ill explain
The why and wherefore of the mystery.
At times they fancied quite that body-growth
Worked revolutions in the mind and sense.
They never dreamed, till some three summers thence,
When wiser with a wisdom poisoning worlds,
And riper in experience bitter-sweet,
That what had first from out their younger hearts
A crystal spring of friendship welled and flowed,
Was eddying past mad passion's muddy tide,
And settling towards the sea of creature-love,
Where some are saved and other some go down.
It is God's way to record keep in Heaven
Of short-lived minutes youth or age devotes

Alexis and Mercedes

To irksome virtue and His half-sweet yoke,
That needs must gall the neck of nature some.
On neighbor page He marks what debts of grace
He owes in mercy slaves, who owe Him all.
And when their needs are greatest, doles them out
Reserve strength, won in fights full easily fought.
Small wonder then that he and she sailed on
Oblivious of the danger howling round;
And but for signs, inexplicably strange,
Unconscious of the crisis in their lives.
God at the wheel, we ride the main secure,
E'en though the pilot sleeps. And had the storm,
Which swept Genesareth that tossing night,
"Lord, save us, or we perish!" woke the Lord,
Delayed its wrath, till tongues of Whitsun-fire
Had forged anew their weak and world-wise hearts,
The fishermen assured had scouted fear,
And placid slept beside their weary Chief.
'Twas thus these slipped beyond the open sea,
Where God came down and fused their creature-love
To love of Him, whose love is alchemy.
For seasons five vacations came and went.
Each period teemed with trivial histories
Of pranks achieved by youngsters born for mirth,
Who at their best are savages untamed,
In durance of exacter training bound;
Of schemes concocted by the tousled heads

Alexis and Mercedes

Of future legislators for a state,
The Nemeses of petty cracks and crimes.
And she amazed his ears with dreadful tales
Of horrid girls, who spoiled the angel looks
Indulgent nature gave, by flashing hate
From eyes God meant for pearls of dewy love;
Who vainly striving to demolish quite
With jealous anger's twisted glance of scorn
Some luckier rival, scored their maiden brows
With furrows, wrinkled age alone should work.

One incident stood out among the rest:
A simple deed, and yet with memories rife,
And ringing echoes of the buried past,
As sweet as moisten orphaned mother's cheeks.
Such echoes in the pilgrim, bowed with years,
And wandered back to where his youth lies dead,
The swaying vines of grape or berry growth,
Along the lazy banks of idle brook,
Evoke, and half persuade him cast aside
His stick, to barefoot walk the pebbly bed,
And feel the coolness rushing as of yore;
Or clamber up the tumbling clumps of clay,
To chase the noisy wren through alder reeds.
For once, when out a-Maying in the woods,
The boys came sudden on an acre hedged,
With crosses rudely carved on rows of mounds,

The sleeping places of what holy priests
Had generations of their earlier selves
Instructed unto justice, and had died.
Obedient to that impulse of the heart,
Which pushes vision past the bounds of sense,
And prays good rest for souls, sojourning still
Apart from God, though His by ties secure,
They doffed their caps, and kneeling on the turf,
Breathed "Aves," that effaced these dead men's
debts,

Then went their way. Alexis lingered still.
For in a corner, where the spears of grass
Were matted thick, and highest in the light,
He spied some traces of a snow-white stone.
The veil of green pushed back, he saw amazed
An angel seated near a willow tree,
With folded wings, as though he parted here
With some fond love, and rested 'gainst fatigue,
Perpetual guardian of the mold beneath.
Four lines of chiselled letters told the tale,
"A Southron's son, who, when the air was chill,
And all the meadows missed reminders of
His boyhood home, had sickened of the mists,
And journeyed on to where 'tis always spring."
No vaunted pedigree, no date of birth,
Nought save the simple declaration that
He had for sire a hero, and released

Alexis and Mercedes

From bondage was one Christmas Eve ago.
But could that angel wake, with tongue of fire
He'd burn the history of a mother's grief
Into the soul of any listener,
And fury with a thousand scourges arm,
To whip to doom the wretch who seared two hearts,
Who pillaged life as though 'twere paltry wealth.
Alexis felt in presence of a friend,
And longed to cut acquaintance with the quick,
If so he might commune with kindlier dead.
The tears fell fast and warm, till nearer shouts
Of mates, returning with the shadows home,
His reveries broke. With stealth he dried his eyes,
And went, his heart with one big secret full.
With studied effort to conceal his mind,
He duly questioned teachers, hoar and old,
It seemed, as frosted moss on college walls,
And serving-men, who made this Muses' seat
Their home for ages. All to purpose none.
The teachers' lives were bounded by their books,
And each year's cares annihilated whole
Remembrance of precedent haps.
The serving-men were strangely blind and dumb
To new events, and counting close of schools
A universal death, took little note
Of such as left the ranks while work was hot.
Tradition whispered hints, too vague and dim

Alexis and Mercedes

To win belief, of how a stranger once
Had called, to put the fair-haired boy to school,
With sundry charges, bearing on his health;
But brusquely cut interrogations short,
Remarking that he would within a month
Indite a note, and settle every doubt.
When taking leave, the man insistent prayed
That no expense be spared to nurse the bloom,
Fast fading from his cheeks, and fit his mind
For higher things the future had in store.
As earnest of good will, he left a sum,
More than sufficient present needs to meet.
Then bade a cold farewell, and out of doors,
He never after darkened, strode away.
The note, however, came. The priest in charge
Full satisfied, its message filed in tome,
That registered transactions of the sort.
But here the story silent fell. The page,
That could unfold a mystery, was lost,
Or stowed away in musty garret-hole,
A meal for worms and mice irreverent.
When last the boy had died, tradition ran,
The marble column, with its epitaph
And weeping angel, from the stranger came,
Requesting that it mark the exile's grave.
Thus far Alexis pierced the uncertain haze,
Enveloping the mound within the grove.

He cut away the weeds about its sides,
And nursed the grass to nature's softest hue.
And yearly, when the day of funeral wreaths,
His parent South to mourning dedicates,
Rolled round, he went a pilgrim to the shrine.
There, on a fragrant heap of wildwood flowers
Laid lovingly his people's battle flag,
Nor ever closed the rite without a prayer
For souls surprised by death when far from home.
It liked him well to linger on this theme,
When in the mellow evenings, head to head,
They talked the hours away. Did he not know
That chords responsive breathed to every sigh
Pity evoked within his tender breast?
Did he not know that somewhere in the North,
Alive or dead, alive she always hoped,
A brother to the maiden at his side
Was swallowed up by fate dark as the tomb?
Her fingers chose and pieced the remnant silk
That waited breezes at the head and foot
Of their dead hero's tomb. She named with care
What flowers of the meadow best became
His hillock bed. And yet nor she nor he
Adverted to the fear that it might chance
The author of what puzzled most their minds
Had been that bearded demon from the North,
Who swaggered past at head of straggler thieves,

Alexis and Mercedes

On booty more than manly battle bent;
And mixing greed with sacred valor's cause,
And war with pillage, tore from out her arms
A mother's son, and went his way to shame.
Surmises, otherwise too strong to down,
Fall weak, when grappling with the shadow hope,
That what we hate to know is still undone.
A woman, weeping at her first born's bier,
Still hopes 'gainst hope the soul's not gone, but sleeps.

This topic never lost its charm; and yet,
The sentiment of tender youth full blown
And blossoming to graver womanhood
And man's estate, more serious thought pushed in,
And crowded hard sweet pity's lighter mood.
Till after graduation, when the wreaths
That crowned their student years, with honor run,
Lay dying on the chapel altar step,
Their minds reverted oft to truths rehearsed
By saintly priest of God, who Moses-like
Had seen His face in prayer's burning bush,
And from the mountain brought a message down
To children groping for a word from Heaven.
It was a college custom ages old
To dedicate the last full week in June
To sober, quiet, meditative calm.
The senior scholars ever made this goal,

Alexis and Mercedes

For which they yearned when younger night and day,
The starting point in what would prove a race
More trying and more rich in ripe results.
The guides, who watched them through apprenticeship,
The deeper to impress the maxims taught,
Secured the experience of holy eld
To drive their lessons home; to speed their sons
This solemn last farewell; to help them fix
Their wildered gaze, and steady look a while
Upon the wreck-strewn verge of life's wild sea.
So smooth his speech, her ears the frequent sob
Of earnestness begot, so much rejoiced,
Mercedes silent mused, and heard her friend
Unnoticed hours impersonate the priest.
At diverse times, as fitful memory bade,
Alexis sweet this solemn topic touched,
And glowed with all the fervor of a saint,
Who seals his days and nights to talk with God.
Mercedes listened diligent. But once,
Resuming all, he singled out the truth
That took complete possession of his soul,
And steady shone when all the rest fell dim.
He phrased his text in simple Latin speech,
And styled it, "Tantum Quantum," magic words
The reverend preacher bade his hearers keep
For rule to square their future conduct by.

Alexis and Mercedes

“To know, to serve, and happy be for aye”
He called foundation of the edifice;
His “Tantum Quantum” was the corner-stone,
To which the builder must full oft revert,
As slow the growing fabric shape assumes.
“To gather tribute from inferior worlds,
And heap their wealth about the feet of God,”
Is service; but some creatures, baffling man,
Refuse the homage he would have them pay,
And sore against his will make mutiny.
An angel face at times stirs other thoughts
Than beauty of divine artificer,
And steals away whole hours from golden prayer.
Sometimes a wealth of money breeds disdain
For Him, who meant the gift t’engender love;
And learning sometimes so degrades a mind
It knows no more of God than servant brutes.
Unthinking herds of base-born slaves plunge in,
And, setting store by what appeals to sense,
With loss neglect to sharp discriminate
Economy of use and abstinence.
With self for gospel and interpreter,
Their hopes sweep lower planes from crib to grave,
Nor ever mount to healthful sky beyond.
They come to rate the hermit’s holocaust
Of joys, that would-be suicides content
With mingled pain, stark madness run amuck ;

Alexis and Mercedes

'Gainst reason's sense they spurn the hostile truth,
"Love's essence hides in stubborn sacrifice,
And friendship moves for war with greedy self."
But sons, instinct with faith, are holier wise;
And, much as nature quarrels with the wrongs
Done flesh (if flesh has right to better use),
Survey the universe of things, and choose.
Some creatures, with an aspect all perverse,
Are gauds to lure unwary souls from God.
They smell of brimstone, and their touch is death.
These have a purpose, and their purpose is
To teach the harder task of abstinence.
Others again by turn or help or hurt;
To-day they lend the struggling pilgrim wings,
To-morrow drag him down with leaden weight.
And so, by dint of opportunity,
The sober use them when they're mooded right,
And hold aloof when that they threaten harm.
Still others bear so deeply graved in front
The seal of God, their love entails no loss,
But rather helps to swell the Maker's praise.
Good gifts like these the pious use with thanks,
And yet stand ready, when the summons comes,
To break from objects dear to them as life,
And snap the bands that kept their hearts in place.
Alexis, thus discoursing, shuddered oft
At distant whispers that he thought he heard.

Alexis and Mercedes

And first he laid his fears with seeming doubt.
But ever nearer drew the voice of God,
Till last it smote his ears in thunder tones.
The Master knocked for entrance at a door
The youth would fain have kept forever barred.
The other portals of his willing soul
He opened wide, and strove to lure Him in;
But Christ in patience waiting stood without,
And ever said him nay, and ever looked
With wistful longing for the knob to turn.
Wisdom cannot deny itself, and sure
Some cogent reason prompts each will of Heaven.
We cannot measure motives infinite;
Enough for us to know that God has spoke.
And so, mayhap to test his hero-strength,
Or save him from disaster hid in time,
God bade Alexis bind and kill the hopes
That rimmed the hours ahead with golden love.
She conscious watched the strife within his thoughts,
And courage prayed to help grace win the day.
Both knew their honeyed dreams unmixed with sin,
Both felt assurance of no danger nigh,
Both hated separation worse than death;
And yet, because they rated even love,
As pure as angel unto angel gives,
A thing designed for higher purposes
Than empty satisfaction of the heart,

Alexis and Mercedes

They bowed their heads to seeming harsh decree;
They sealed their gift to Him who made it sweet,
And gifts made God flow back with interest.

'Twas late in summer, when the starry lights
Along the marge of Heaven seem nearer earth,
So clear the air, their signal beams so bright.
The night was speeding fast, and side by side
These journeyed on in silence 'neath the trees,
When, as the moon pushed past a sailing cloud,
They paused, and hand in hand each looked at each,
And mutual watched the brimming tears arise.
Then buoyant sad, with Faith close at their heels,
Into the open field they stepped and stood,
Clothed with the mellow light, that leaps about
Some sculptured saint in niched cathedral dome,
When all the lamps save one are quenched and dark.
Their feet were in the buttercups, that still
Adorned the stem, from which long years ago
He plucked the gold to toy with at her chin.
Instinctively they knelt, and with two stars
For tapers right and left of summer moon,
The moon itself reminder of the Host,
Emblazoned in the sky, they said their vows.
They plighted troth with God, to live for Him;
For His sweet sake to swift surrender joys
They once in spirit tasted; to retain

Alexis and Mercedes

Nought save their memory, till, this exile done,
They met where love's the principle of life,
Where nights and morns are holidays of love,
Where love eternal marks the flight of time.
Fearful of rapine in the holocaust,
He quickly wrung her hand, and headlong walked
That night recesses of the wilderness,
To lonely spot beside a singing spring,
Where he had weeks before a clearing made,
Had reared a hermit's dwelling, and laid by
Store of provisions 'gainst the winter months.
With these and game, that wind and weather drove
To deeper cover of the trackless woods,
He life sustained, till spring woke from the ground.
Then rows of garden seed were duly set,
To ripen ere the summer came and went.
And so, for ten slow years he knew not man;
But closer strove to daily get to God.
By turns he toiled, and prayed, and sang the hymns
He sang in chapel when a boy at school.
Mercedes stood a moment, till his form
Grew indistinct against the netted boles.
Then, stronger with the strength example lends,
Pressed homeward, on the morrow all intent.
No pillow kept her weary head that night;
But, with a tender parent's hand for help,
She ready made to journey to the hill

Alexis and Mercedes

Where first she learned how sweet a thing it is
To lead a dying life for love of God.
The mother from some stray remarks had guessed
A year beforehand all the daughter's mind,
And time had robbed her early pain of edge.
Two hurried days of travel to the North
Mercedes Sisson to the convent brought.
The oaken doors rolled back, the pious nuns
Her advent made a holiday of cheer.
With sombre gown, and beads, and crucifix,
Full soon she radiant moved from task to task,
And felt the blitheness of her youth return.
Alexis seldom crossed her mind, and then
His image came to tip some holy thought.
When that she sat the centre of a troop
Of noisy children, grouped for sport and play,
Or from her class-room throne looked down upon
Mock-sober curls, apparent bent on books,
She ever prayed kind Heaven to keep their hearts,
And begged their Father send them happier hours,
Or, if He meant to lead them thorny ways,
To give them grace to wait as waited she.
Her sisters noted proud the eager pace
At which she mounted virtue's steep ascent;
And laggards, gray in service, oft drew shame
From hero-efforts of the novice-maid.
In time they made her abbess, and 'tis said

Alexis and Mercedes

Her rule was wondrous kind; so mild withal
It minded subject nuns of Nazareth,
Where man gave orders, and a God obeyed.
She wrought her household unto lives of faith,
More by example than by soulless words;
And ever counted kind entreaty speech
More gently potent than rough-ribbed reproof.
She held herself appoint to lighten loads
That God in season never fails to send;
Nor e'er usurped His vast prerogative,
To harass hearts, whose woes she could not know.
With her, position was a sacred trust,
But then fulfilled, when used to faster run,
And distance others in the race for good;
Its only privilege, more time for prayer.
And so, when night had settled calm upon
Some busy day, and all her daughters slept,
The abbess oft with book and candle climbed
To belfry window, where she paid to God
The hours distraction from His service stole.
This window, built into the tower's east,
Looked full upon the graveyard-mounds to right,
Where once Alexis vigil kept and prayed.
The weeds he cut away had sprung again,
To hide the stone, the chiselled story veil.
In vain, when midnight closed her lengthened prayers,
She frequent sat an hour beneath the moon

Alexis and Mercedes

That flooded all the fields around with day,
And strove to read what always fled her eyes.
Till once some merry villagers below,
Returning with the morn from city rout,
Pointed their fingers at the belfry light,
Which leaped awhile, then in the darkness died.
A hush fell on the convent halls next day.
Demure the girls discoursed in whisper tones,
And walked more quiet, not to wake the dead.
The sisters wept what tears bedew the cheeks
Of new-made orphans, and disconsolate,
Sought in remembrance of their mother saint
Comfort for loss. They found her cold in death.
Her book lay open, and her head was bowed;
But agony had not bedimmed the smile
That played about the corners of her lips;
The evening of her life had been so like
The summer day that spends itself in tears,
To melt near sunset into silver blue.
For, as the sleeping air awoke at sound
Of minster clock, proclaiming half the night,
She saw the grave far off in glory clouds,
And all the ground about lay smooth with grass.
Upon the mound two angel faces shone,
And drank in rapture from each other's eyes.
These only paused to wave a welcome hand,
And when they looked her way, she recognized

Alexis and Mercedes

Alexis and the boy she knew for kin.
Deep in the tangled growth of world-old oaks,
Beside the spring, that hour Alexis sat,
To muse on all that had been in the past,
To praise the love that hedged his heart with grace.
For grace's ways much of their mystery lose
To souls, that meditate apart from man,
Creation's greatest glory and its shame.
That day was consecrate to hymns of thanks,
It rounded out the singer's thirtieth year;
And, when in distant cities midnight pealed,
His head lay tired upon his hands and knees,
And life was ebbing. Sudden past him swept
The hallowed sight Mercedes dying saw,
Her candle in its socket burning low.
Convulsively he made as if to move,
But energy was gone with tenant soul.
The shadows round fell silent, save for cries
Of whippoorwill, that made the night air ring
With courage songs to her too timid young.
Two pilgrims entered into rest eterne,
And at the open gate expectant stood
A herald, sent to bid them welcome home.
And so these three passed up to where God sits,
The central sun of love that lives in death,
A brother, sister, and a friend to both;
A Southron's son, a bridegroom, and his bride.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

A RETREAT IN VERSE

Like one inspired, the preacher rolled his eyes
The sinful world across, in spirit called
The wheeling multitude of men to halt,
And hearing hold for aye the message sent.
Then swift the message came in thunder tones.
As who oppressed by legion cannon roar,
He closed his trembling lids, laid hands aface,
Then took the burden of his lesson up.

FIRST WEEK

The soul to life, the sun and soil to flower;
E'en such the motive to man's every deed.
The common thief, whose very breath defiles,
Is more a man than recreant sons of God,
Who counter run to principles deep set
And seated solemn in their inmost thoughts.
Whoever robs by rule, at least, has made
Ill-gotten wealth the beacon of his hopes.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Brave, though dishonest, on and up he fights
To where that greasy lanthorn hangs and spits.
But they, the narrow path illumined white
With smiles of Father, throned at journey's top,
And stretching hands that reach from end to end,
The path close hedged on either side with law,
Or climb the fence, and travel through the woods;
Or fools their faces set the other way,
And tire themselves in chase of shadow ghosts.
Man's Maker had vast interests at stake,
When making man sole agent of His praise.
And conscious of the wavering pendulous,
Inherent in His creature's weaker will,
Wisely ordained a sore discomfort smart
For robbery done His name in baser mood.
To know, to serve, and happy be for aye;
To gather tribute from inferior worlds,
And heap their wealth about the feet of God;
This is the tune to which man's heart is set.
This duty done, God's spirit fingers run
Along the chords, soul music to compound,
As smooth as beats with echo of His breath.
But duty spurn aside, to passion yield
The strings it only thrums to snap to shreds;
Art falls to noise, and leaden heavy thumps
Oppress the wretched heart, but ill at ease
With all creation and its nobler self.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

This earth is sorrow's parent; and this earth
Bore other sons, till sin rose on the winds
And blasted all its face. Accumulate
The ills of pestilence, of famine, war,
Whatever ghosts of evil stalk across
Black-bordered page of human history;
The pile will tower steady to the sky,
Without, however, piercing through the clouds.
But sin, where sorrow never entered in,
Essayed awhile to dwell, and even knocked
At Eden's inner gate. For angels sinned!
The pile will steady rise; but bow your back,
And dig away the dirt about its base;
The fabric's last support is primal sin
Wedged thick and close about with recent crime.
Nay, more; that pestilence, which made some towns
Foul charnel houses in the long ago,
Its narrow circuit walked mayhap a year,
Then in the desert met a lonesome end.
But death, since sin first let him loose upon
Defenceless worlds of men, can never die;
And each day's scattered victims form a state
As populous as petty kings oppress;
A harvest rich as when historic plagues
Made havoc in a land, death reaps to-day.
This very hour the neighbor at my side
He steadfast looks upon. To-morrow morn

We'll meet death in the street; and he and we
Shall jostle 'gainst some fellow singled out
To walk dark ways with him to-morrow night.
Hunger abroad with sickness hand in hand
So tight has drawn the skin on throbbing brow,
The brain within betrayed its solemn trust;
And famine herded to the market-place
Mad droves of human beasts, who, spectre-like,
Sat waiting for the death king's phantom ship,
To ride them to forgetfulness and gloom.
Yea, more than once, against all law of kind,
Did woman steep her hands and wet her lips
In the red current of a tender life,
To suckle which she should have pricked her heart.
This sin's a cunning executioner;
And lest the wretch it piecemeal slays escape
An ounce of all his heavy weight of pain,
It sleepless dances in his troubled dreams,
And leaves unwelcome thought. It whets the sense
To quiver neath the fang of fell remorse,
From reason's cradle to the grave of age.
Its lash can whip the parent to do things
A woman's son must blush to even name.
Who has not seen a mother's greed for pelf,
Or for society's ambiguous smile,
A daughter deck for sacrificial feast,
Whose ghoulish priest's a demon hot from hell?

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Why, war is nature's sickle sent afield
To cut away superfluous growth of men,
And mercifully keep a tainted race
From dwindling to rude cannibals or worse.
Now roar the guns; to-morrow's bugle blast
Summons the combatants to stack their arms.
The dead are buried, and the live march home
To watch their children and their children's sons
Enjoy what years of peace their travail wrought.
The clouds of battle smoke, now rolling dun
The other side of earth, nor load our air
With powder smell, nor midday sun obscure.
But sin involves a universe in gloom.
Wherever souls exist, the rays of love,
God meant to stream in floating radiance down,
Are darkened quite, or duller than the beams
Of morn-smit moon. No more the golden days,
When man and Maker walked as friend and friend,
And sin lay hidden in the womb of time.
Sin's hosts are stout and strong. In them defeat
Arouses latent strength for new assaults.
They send no herald with the flag of truce,
But hack and slash till God war's finish cries.
Their fury ceases not with victim's death;
But on the verge of the dead craven's grave
A thousand demons grin, and with the clay
Spades toss upon the coffin-lid, leap down

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

To carry off the prize to farthest hell,
And, deep within their prison house of fire,
Torment him long as God's unending wrath
Blows hot upon the heads of rebel sons.

SECOND WEEK

Then, who will lead a world into the fray?
We are not cowards all. We need a King
To marshal us together, bind us tight,
And prop our weakness with the godlike strength
That oneness of design alone begets.
We need a cause, round which to rally men,
However mean, with still an instinct left
For what is true and good; with courage still
To grapple death along the path to fame.
We need a captain of some sterner mould
Than puny beings of a day can boast.
We are but men, and half our nature claims
Dull kinship with the heavy clay we tread.
Our foes are angels, who stand next to God
In graded scale of things that move and live.
No mixture of a baser element
Mars the perfection of their spirit thews,
And solid worlds of matter offer them
No more resistance than an idle breeze.
We're groundling doubters, and we woo despair.
So well acquaint with loss our little lives

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

That faith, to hold our ears, must whisper hopes
Not long deferred, or back her pledges strong
With bonded promise of eternal truth.
But, lo! we have a Captain and a cause.
We muster ranks about Omnipotence.
The handle of the flag, whose waving folds
Enshadow us, is wet with drops of blood
That reddened once no less a heart than God's.
And mark it well! God sent no vicar down;
But came in lowly garb to lead His hosts.
So much He dreaded coward man's unfaith,
He moved His court to earth, His splendor veiled,
And dealt in person with the knights He chose.
We turn time back, in spirit climb across
The crumbled pillars of two thousand years.
We touch the dust-stained hem of one who walked
The by-ways of Judea, seeking hearts
Full willing to take up the weary march.
We hear the steady tramp of war astir;
For men are moving to the vale below.
Their Leader's words are music to their thoughts,
And God has sworn that victory shall crown
The hero brows embarked in this campaign;
That death, like the avenging angel sent
The sons of Egypt to exterminate,
Shall reverence his Master's seal of love,
And pass them by untouched. Some night they'll sleep,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

To wake and find that peace is dawned at last.
Their foes will fancy death has worked its will.
But vain their thoughts! For long as glory's king
Shall sit enthroned, these, crimson with their blood,
Shall file in triumph past their Captain's tent
With palm in hand and songs upon their lips.
Descend we then to plain where temple spires
And prayerful quiet of Jerusalem
Are mirrored summer evenings by the sun,
When shadows steal across the city walls,
And, joining forces in the field below,
Involve one side of earth in gloom of night.
Jerusalem, God's citadel of peace,
Smiles down a welcome to these men of Christ,
The footsore soldiers of a footsore King.
And Christ Himself, the man whose face is fair
With all the beauty resident in God,
Is whispering through the line His plan of war.
To subjugate the nations to His sway,
To teach mankind that riches, honors, pride,
Are poison parents of death dealing sin;
To be the workmen who rebuild a world,
And raise His kingdom on the ruins of hearts;
To chase to farthest hell the rebel host
Which now beneath the noise of Babylon
Is mustering for the fray. The smoke and fire,
That lap their chieftain in a horrid maze,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

But half portray the fierceness of his hates,
The mad confusion reigning in his schemes,
The vapory foundations of his rule.
Dread Satan sits enthroned, and hot for war,
By terror rules his crew of cringing slaves,
Too weak to quarrel with his empty wrath,
And ready to his will because embarked
In kindred struggle with a common foe.
Commingled and compact in serried ranks,
Held fast together by their purpose fell,
Whether from earth or hell, his helpers stand
Awaiting orders from their beetling chief.
These demons red with mercy's kindled fire,
These men of sin, in all but nature imps,
And distant but the hour of life from woe,
Are bidden trespass wide, on harm intent,
And crowd pain's prison tight with captive wrong.
Their prey the senseless sons of folly's dupes,
Dull Adam, duller Eve. Whatever lures,
Whatever methods time effective proved,
Are theirs by favor of their robber lord;
To dazzle hungry eyes with glint of gold,
To poison minds with venom scraped from crowns,
And bury fetid hearts in pleasure's tomb.
Their greed for wealth appeased, ambition's whip
Must scourge their toiling backs to honor's height.
Interment follows, when, their forces spent,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

They shuffle dumb, like stricken beasts afield,
Into the open grave of lust and shame.
Our Captain Christ is seated on no throne.
He walks the pliant grass, with flowers besprent,
His pathway redolent with sainthood's charms;
For virtue rests the eye, and smells more sweet
Than odors trapped in vales of Araby.
No bluster marks His speech. He summons round
The poor, the humble, sorrow's servitors,
Lean hermits, virgins, martyrs red with wounds.
His army counts whatever hero lived
To make his fellows proud of their estate,
And died to lighten cowards of despair.
Men blindly grope their devious way towards truth,
And cry a teacher who unerring knows,
Nor ever risks conjecture. Courage fails
Endeavor, when defeat is single wage.
So well acquaint with loss our little lives,
We need a Leader, who can hold us tight
To duty in disaster's killing air,
With force of His example's bracing strength.
Our weakness needs addition from on high.
No vigor that a body's might conceals
Can dare a spirit to the field and win.
And Christ is Leader, Model; Christ invests
Our faintness with omnipotence's might
In shape of purchased sacramental grace,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

The miracle that changes mortal men
To sons of God, and stamps them part divine.
A wisdom more than human crowds the page
Of gospel narrative, and Christ our King
Is hero of the golden story writ.
Our aim is lofty, our ideals high.
With God for inspiration and for pledge,
We pitch our purpose to the very stars,
Ambitioning the holiness of God.
For sainthood is divinity revealed,
And since what hallowed time the Father's Son,
Assuming flesh, with virtue walked the earth,
Men's eyes are open to the splendid sight.
Intoxicate with His example's wine,
They clamor still to heights beyond earth's ken.
Christ walks ahead, His servants follow on
From Bethlehem to the gory hill of skulls,
Where death relieves His shoulders of their load.
The wind that whistled through the shepherds' cave
That cheerless Christmas night, and struck God chill,
Can harden tender bodies to the pain
It costs to win salvation; and the rags
That bound His royal limbs are witness mute
That men, to merit His approving smile,
Must gird themselves with nakedness and want.
The lesson of detachment written large
Across the mystery of the boy-God lost,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

And found again within the temple walls,
Must urge domestic men shake off the thrall
That ties them to the fireside and its joys,
And stout apostles walk the weary waste
Of friendless duty, with the sky for roof
And heartless strangers for their next of kin.
One only love with right usurps our dreams,
And God is centre of our fonder thoughts.
All other loves, as contraband of war,
Encounter best employment in neglect.
They shorten power for good, and Samsons shear
To bury them in shame's ignoble grave.
Obedience borrows glamor from the years
At Nazareth. Their seeming idle peace
Is tribute to the worth of solitude,
When all its golden hours encourage growth
In wisdom, age, and grace with God and men.
Through all the story of His hero life
One lesson runs. We cannot keep His ranks
Unless we make fair holiness our own,
And wear its whiteness to the battle's end.
His soldiers must be saints. No other good
Of talent, prowess, beauty, can atone
For single want of sterling virtue's seal.
We must be born anew; and sacrifice
Is cruel parent to this second birth.
And ready we must ply the rending knife,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Our heart the victim to be cut in twain.
Delay is fatal. When the dread decree
Smites coward sense a-tremble with dismay,
Despatch is half the fight, and waiting whets
The sharpness of attack, to dull our edge.
When folly prompts some silly subterfuge,
We must be speedy. Else we murder hope,
And die of indecision, like the man,
Who, sick of fever, prayed for quick relief,
And with the neighbor breath rejected cure,
Because the medicine angered haughty taste.

THIRD WEEK

And now in slow procession towards the mount,
Where virtue bled to make us sinners whole,
Where God bowed to the death-blow meant for men,
We pick our way past beasts our Captain slew;
And under cover of His pity's shield
Escape the darts aimed at us from the hedge.
Or if stray missiles prick us with their smart,
The wound heals up, and never steals a life.
Nay, more; to dull the pain of trivial hurts,
We sometimes reckon past endurance harsh,
Christ walks the street with mocking shouters choked;
Nor shuts His ears to shrieks of ribald tongues,
His lifted hand could have with palsy smote;
Nor drops His lids on hell-fed mob's grimace,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Fashioned by sons whose love He yearning craves.
He naked takes the lash plied hard and thick,
And barefoot treads the way with sorrows paved.
And when He climbed the gibbet of the Cross
Some braver friends hugged close its gory foot;
But none were called to mount with Him its height.
Too thick the shadows in that lofty air
For unassisted man to breathe and live.
No martyr dies but that a spirit choir
Descends to soothe with music's balm his pains,
And worlds applaud his courage to the skies.
But Calvary's griefs assuagement none allowed.
For timid Peter watched them from afar;
The Father sent no comfort angel down,
And seemed to turn His eyes to other wheres.
E'en so, whatever ills oppress us hard
In building of the kingdom, Christ is near,
To bear the brunt, and let us easily off.
Whatever joys He has, to parcel round,
Abundant flow into our straitened hearts.
That Easter morn He dazzled Mary's eyes
With splendor issuing from His gory wounds,
Was but a prelude to the days and nights
He spent in converse with more timid friends.
He was not ready yet to home return,
Till doubting Thomas satisfied his doubts,
And tasted comfort he so ill deserved.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

And when He rose beyond the servant clouds,
By miracle, that left small room for fear,
As loath to overtax their too weak faith,
He earthward sent a herald from His court
To rouse their sleeping sense and give them heart.
The artist skilled in measured sound and song,
His wizard hand to crowning effort set,
For prelude to the piece he earnest means
To captive take the world of listening ears
And hold attention to the end of time,
Tears from the tingling fibre of his soul
Successive sweeps of music brief and tense,
Instinct with passion's grandeur, and the sum
Of sequent breaths in wild profusion blent.
Redemption's song is God's own masterpiece;
The Eucharist, its prelude, smooth and stern.
Sublimier than creation, it combines
Man's sweetest joy, his Maker's sharpest woe;
It sates a Father's burning wish to dwell
Anear the children of His blood and tears,
And puts renewal of the traitor's kiss
In easy reach of spendthrift prodigals,
That love divine may still on sorrow feed.
This dogma to the limit vexes minds.
God on our altars is beyond the ken
Of mortal vision, faith's profoundest truth,
Where seeming wheat is changed by miracle

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

To living flesh, and what was purple wine
Becomes the crimson blood of God made man;
Where elements, that nourish life we know,
Give place to principles that fatten thews
Of spirit beings in the realms of grace.
This wine of virgins, bread of God's elect,
Lend substance to our hope. In process still
Of promise Christ held speech that sure implies
A blessed resurrection for such souls
As, docile to His wishes, drink and eat.
To be the vicar of a friend in death,
To die to purchase life for him we love,
Is friendship's crowning effort. Language fails
To character devotion of the sort
That after mortal torments reassumes,
From motives of affection, second life,
To die unceasing, mystically slain.
And so this sacred meal is virtue's sum,
The test of loyal faith, hope's flawless bond,
Securest pledge of love that mutual reigns
Between men's Maker and His servant sons.
Small wonder then that seated at the feast,
This night of wonders, heralding the cross,
The Master lifted from His inmost heart
The sigh attendant on accomplishment.
Desiring He desires to eat this Pasch
With His disciples, since it tolls the hour

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

For morning Masses to the end of time,
And opens wide for death's exultant King
The gateway to Redemption's road of grief.
Nobility is service; and to stamp
Th' unwelcome truth on laggard minds
Of pupils in His school, He plays the slave,
And girt with towel washes clean their feet.
Saint Peter meets the lesson with a vaunt
Of boastful pride; and Judas, dead to grace,
Instead of shouting out with penance pain,
And winning pardon by acknowledgment,
Hugs treason tighter in his reddening thoughts.
The awesome mystery done, God leads the man
In Christ to garden sown with funeral trees,
And through the gaping pores bares to the night
The leaping current of His troubled blood.
The shimmering light of March's colder moon
And winter's distant stars in snowy sky
Lend gruesome color to the killing scene.
Savage abandonment with viselike grip
Takes murderous hold to crush Him towards despair.
With prayer for single weapon of defence,
He fights disaster off, and courage plucks
From stout submission to the Father's will
To victory win. The chalice passes not,
But angel hands support it to His lips;
And honey hope, like drop of medicine dew,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Slips to its depths, to sweeten all the dregs.
Again our giant rises from the dust,
Exulting still to run His course towards death.
False friendship, like a robber masked and dark,
Starts sudden in His pathway. All the light
Falls from His eyes, when Judas with a kiss,
With what the ages reckon seal and sum
Of ripened love, betrays his Master, Christ,
To hounds unleashed from hatred's lowest hell.
The Lamb to slaughter marches meek and dumb.
One priest of demons plies the scourge of scorn,
To pass his victim to another's ire.
One alley ruffian smites with knotted fist;
Another viler voids his fouler mouth
Upon the face that mirrors Paradise.
Last, Rome in judgment sits, and Pilate calls
To trial the culprit for a people's sins.
His verdict stands towards pardon, but the fears
Ambition conjures frighten Pilate more
Than conscience; and the monstrous deed is done.
The spiteful crown of thorns, the scarlet rag,
The reed that pounded all His head with pain,
Are grim reminders of the night of woe
The Saviour sleepless watched in Jewry's jail.
His scourging at the pillar stands for time
A monument to blazon unto men
The gory wage just God exacts from crime.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Our gentle Jesus of the Sacred Heart,
His body tender as the Mother Maid,
Who nursed against this night of butchery
His boyhood years, is hemmed around with wolves.
His flesh, the temple of divinity,
Enlivened by a soul that never thought
Offence or harm, responsively alive
To every jarring shock, runs red with blood
Beneath the swinging rods plied fast and thick;
And all the pavement mirrors murder back.
Alone, forsaken, He is teacher still,
And all the lesser virtues, touch of kin
Enhances in our dealings man with man,
An added lustre borrow from the scene.
The word in season and the welcome smile,
That keeps a hunted brother from despair,
Assume the mantle of sublimity
When studied in connection with our Christ.
To take the stranger's part, to brace his arm,
Is stealing to the pillar's side to bid
The heart of God be brave. To Golgotha
We speedy passage make. Small need to count
The stones He reddened as He bleeding went;
Each streak a saving mark to cancel sin,
A kneeling angel guards each ruddy drop,
That more than ransoms worlds of captive men.
The triple fall but whets the soldiers' wrath,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

And sorrow is eclipsed when Son and Mother meet
To speak their silent love in helpless grief.
The image grateful God on napkin spread,
Come down the ages, preaches pity's worth.
The women, bidden save their tears for woes
To follow fast, their eyes the drier weep.
Pain's triumph nears an end. A city climbs
The holy mount, and all the air is still.
The light uneasy grows, the hollow earth
Makes ready to unloose its buried dead.
Our man of sorrows, Christ, Redemption's King,
His throne a cross, a round of cruel thorns
His crown, is raised aloft and pendent hangs
To lift creation to His open side.
And muffled bells within the dreamy past
Are tolling a dead era to the tomb.
The hands upon the face of time turn back,
The night is over, hope can breathe again.
The race is run, and this the winner's wreath,
The God of life is dead that men may live.
Sin's shackles from our feet are rived apart,
We muster ranks with legion-sons redeemed.
And oh, the power within our puny hands!
When all is said, our fate rests with ourselves.
Despite the cross, despite the nails of love,
That tied the Saviour to His bed of pain,
We can, if minded wrong, past that and these,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Impatient of restraint, walk straight to hell.
Before we leave our station on the hill,
With Whitsun-fire for candle to our thoughts,
We busy gather lessons. Hatred deep
As ocean's floor stirs in the student soul
With contemplation of the monster, crime.
Sin slaughtered God, and sinners at this hour
Upon our street renew the tragedy.
Surpassing large the Master's goodness looms
On the horizon topped with distant cross.
Creation proves God's kindness to a friend
Who, naked still of titles to His love,
At least deserved no hate. Redemption means
To lavish favors on rebellious slaves
That planned their owner's death. Hope borrows
health
Immortal from the Father's wild desire
To save a dying race. In rescue work
He drained of moisture all the veins of Christ;
To raise us to the sky He cannot halt
At lesser sacrifice. When we reflect
That zeal was single motive of the cross,
And gnaws His Sacred Heart as thirst the throat,
New ardor settles on our work for souls.
Rehearse in sorrow all the story's woe,
Examples start at every bend and turn;
No nook or corner but a virtue hides,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

And Christ is preaching in the solemn still.
The olive garden and its rending prayer,
The traitor's kiss, the pillar running blood,
The tearing crown, the reed, the tiny cry
Proclaiming finish in a minor key;
Each incident can harden us to grief,
Can chase the coward from our timid bones,
Enabling us to walk red duty's mile,
And close a hidden life of seeming loss,
Reputed thieves and consecrate to shame.

FOURTH WEEK

As who in trackless desert meets a beast
With rolling eyes and dripping jaws of blood,
Beats swift retreat, and pauses not till, safe
Within the shelter of a friendly camp,
He gathers breath and strains his patient ears
To catch the echo of pursuant roar;
So rest we after our encounter grim
With sin, the havoc-wolf that through the years
Our errant souls with frequent death essayed
To menace, and in savage fashion slew
The lamb of God, men's hostage and their price.
And Easter is our refuge. All its joys
Are spread, to recompense the grievous hours
We spent in self-enquiry's sombre wood.
Its sunshine, tempered by spring's softest air,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Lends artist nature wizardry to sow
The flaming field with colors that reflect
Sky-meadows, where the stars are daisy-heads
And clouds are heather-bloom. Its open gate
Inviting welcome waves to pilgrims, tired
Of harsh withal, though holy journey sped.
And peace is burden of its every breath;
God's handiwork, the peace surpassing thought,
Where, all the warring passions still, hearts slip
Unthinking past the killing strife with sin
To calm of union such as angels know.
We walk another way, and mingle glad
With triumph's army of exultant souls,
Forward to shout Hosannas to their King.
In these surroundings care has no excuse,
And joy is single tenant of the heart.
The sun's Creator rises with the morn,
And while the servant star floods hill and vale
With life, in semblance of creative light,
Its Lord and Master quickens deader men
To springing hope, renascent from the tomb.
And ever since that holy hour of dawn
With gladness saw death's conqueror arise,
And shake funereal wrappings from His limbs,
To pierce with splendor adamant rock,
As beams ethereal cleave opposing glass,
We sons of sorrow vigil keep the night

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Preceding Easter, and expectant wait
To see the fire dance in the flaming East,
And taste the sweetness of contentment's smile
In unison with resurrection's light.
Thus girded for the marvels soon to break
Upon our startled vision, lo, we follow dumb
The way with wonders scattered. First we speed
From burial garden to the prison house,
Where all the virtue, saved from primal age,
Awaits the mercy word to pass the gates,
And mount the singing sky to glory's seats
It bought with wounds. The patriarchs and kings,
The prophets, captains, and stout fighting men,
Who walked with justice and for Israel died,
Aware of finish to the weary years,
By God appointed, strain their ears and eyes,
All greedy for the golden bars to melt
At sound of shout proclaiming sweet release.
In spirit ranks they crowd the Saviour's side,
And to the music choiring angels sing
Make solemn entry to the upper air.
Then rapid as the wings of thunder's light,
Keep steady pace with Christ to humble roof,
Where Mary deep'in prayer awaits her son.
They do obeisance to their crownéd Queen,
And spell the rapture in her mother-eyes
That sate their thirst with floods of joyous tears,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Provoked by memory of the bitter past,
Commingle with fruition's sweeter wage.
This filial function done, in eager flight
The Saviour hurries whither pity calls.
For Magdalen, the conquest of His love,
Is keeping vigil at His empty tomb.
A prey to thoughts conflictive, she resolves
To yield her broken life, if need arise,
Where last the Master's form her vision crossed.
Distracted, torn, she parleys with the guard,
Told from the triumph-throng to watch and wait,
These mute reminders of the stubborn truth,
To wait is costlier service than to work.
Giant absorption signals giant love,
And Magdalen is docile to the spell.
Her heart is not divided, Christ is all.
These angels streaming radiance dazzle not
Her steadfast eyes on one sole object fixed.
Without emotion or regret she leaves
Their splendid presence, to enquiry make
Of seeming farmer in the garb of toil.
And workmen in the vineyard harvest weeds,
When aught save souls immortal is their quest;
And teachers in the Kingdom hirelings are,
Unless they tutor with impartial care
Their boorish lads and angel boys alike.
"Mary," "Rabboni," tear the veil aside,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

And mutual recognition crowns the word.
Our follies are no everlasting bar
To union with the God they sorely hurt.
This woman, plucked from shame's abysmal depths,
By pity her heroic love provoked,
In Christ's unerring friendship second sits
To Virgin Mother, never touched by sin.
Repentance made ambassador to men,
Who wield the mystic key to glory's gates,
His ears by distant cry for succor smote,
Our Shepherd hastes to save the doubting two
Who tired of dull delay and quarrelled quick
With hope's slow process of accomplishment.
These hold the open road to Emmaus,
Their tottering faith intent on rest at home,
Where, freed from terrors of a dismal week,
It may in quiet mend its hurts, and live.
Away from mutual prayer's attendant might,
From stouter help example lends, away,
These hardly guess at what a headlong pace
They journey towards disaster's yawning chasm.
They loosen fetters round their straitened hearts
With aid of converse. And their talk is right.
It bears on Christ, with solemn sad discourse
Of execution week. And God draws near,
To keep the promise with His children passed,
Where two are gathered with His name for tie,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

He walks their midst. While sorrow veils their eyes
To person of the guest they entertain,
Their wiser hearts are sensible to God
And know unusual warmth. In pilgrim garb
He plies the teacher's trade, and, step by step,
These pupils, slow with folly, renders fit
To grapple tight religion's crowning truth,
Beatitude is guerdon still to pain.
Their faith on surer basis set, their hope
From disappointment's killing pressure freed,
The Master tests the measure of their love
By sundry hints of faring far ahead,
And braving hidden perils of the night.
Their charity rings true, and straight bespeaks
A shelter for the seeming stranger's head,
"Stay with us, sir; the day is nearly done,
The shadows tall approaching dark announce."
And captive to men's kindness, God obeys.
The humble meal is spread; and, lo, this home
Of Cleophas a sacred temple grows.
The high priest girds Himself for sacrifice,
The victim of Redemption's slain anew,
To be His people's mystic food and drink;
The Mass of mystery down the ages starts
Its mercy-errand, scattering wide and far
What penetrating light enables hearts
To recognize their God when bread is broke.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

And now we reverent progress make to Galilee,
For meeting angels promised at the tomb.
Our Shepherd comforts first what loyal sheep
Stand steadfast through temptation's whirling storm,
And next He rescues from impending death
What fainter hearts contemplate grim despair.
His flock is folded, and His thoughtful care
Reverts to distant time, when, labor o'er,
He rides the climbing clouds to topmost Heaven,
And leaves a Vicar, wielding equal power,
And like prerogative to teach and rule;
A man as other men, of flesh and blood,
To whom his fellows can in time of stress
Appeal for guidance, while their absent king
Obtrudes His presence in our Church's laws.
To test this Vicar's fitness, He ordains
A solemn conclave called beside the sea,
Where Peter stands inspection and proves true.
For witness to the function, rich in wide
And dread results, He summons other six,
Whose word holds credit with the court of time.
These count two rivals, Thomas slow of faith,
A noisy sceptic of colossal doubt,
And him the Christ proclaimed withouten guile.
At Peter's bidding, for his wish is law,
They sail the heavy night, and search the depths
Of storied sea for its elusive spoils;

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Their spirits broken and their limbs fatigued,
They hail with morning light the Master's form;
With booty load the creaking vessel's hold;
Partake with wonder of the frugal meal
His bounty spread, and lend attentive ear
To solemn interview that follows fast.
The post of honor in His rising Church
A humble mind, a heart on fire demands.
No more the boastful Peter, wiser grown,
His prowess vaunts. As Simon, son of John,
He spells confusion in his origin,
And rests his title on the single word,
"Thou knowest that I love." The test is done.
Christ's Vicar kneels, supremest king on earth,
While God commissions him with sacred power,
And wets his head with unction of command.
His care, the older sheep, the younger lambs;
His subjects, bishops, priests, and people are.
His kingdom knows no bounds of time or place,
And hell's assailing might shall beat in vain
Its adamantine gates. Stout Peter's word
As bond secures his coronation oath,
And whispered prophecy the veil, that hides
Fulfilment, moves aside. Events shall prove
What virtue lay in Whitsun tongues of fire.
Heroic years shall win him martyr's crown;
The servant, share his Master's cross in death.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

We get but glimpses of what glory hours
The risen Saviour scattered as He went
From single friend to friend and wondering group.
These forty days in closest converse spent
With sons He hated still to orphans leave,
Knew rapture that the saints and angels know,
And teemed with earnest talk and sage advice.
He set His kingdom on foundations strong,
To weather tempests that the ages hid;
He left His children rules to guide them right
Past dangers fatal to unaided minds;
And counselled practices that peopled since
His second Kingdom with the world's elect.
Tradition reaches down the stretch of years
To make us paupers rich with lessons wise,
He taught the favored few these busy days.
Where pain is dead, emotions strange akin
To jealousy assert annoying sway,
And angels envy men God's longer stay;
A vacant throne makes clamor for its king,
And prayers descend, to urge His swift return.
His mission filled, no need to tarry more,
And mountain top, last imprint of His feet
Made sacred ground, looms large within His thoughts.
The hour appointed come, He leads the way,
With love's attendant suite in solemn train;
And farewells said, He soars aloft on wings,

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Almighty strength to human body fits.
The cross of blessing that His lifted hand
Then traced upon the air, to eyes of faith
Still blazes trailing pathway to the sky,
And heartens cowards fighting towards the right,
As once its neighbor sign flashed victory
To Constantine. With lighter cloud for car,
He journeys past the spaces planets walk,
Till distance overcomes desiring eyes,
And body vision yields to spirit sight.
The wonder that our fathers in the faith
Beheld with rapture this Ascension Day
Is ours to witness morning, night, and noon.
Each day's horizon and the starry heights,
If we but listen to our answering hearts,
Are sweet reminders of the triumph throng
That kept the Master's side from earth to Heaven,
And entered glory's home with glory's King.
When sorrow threatens, we must climb on high,
Give pause to labor, lift our weary heads,
And dashing back the tears that ready rise,
See joys a Father fashions for His sons.
The tawdry earth a sordid bauble seems,
Its pleasures wear to weariness or worse,
When, breasting wings that meditation lends,
We pilfer golden hours of idle ease
From busy care, to rest us at God's feet.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

For God is beauty, love is beauty's thrall;
And men are captive to its tyrant charm.
Our hearts, transplanted to the realms of bliss,
In truth experience no essential change;
And beauty infinite exerts a spell,
If we but knew, as potent here as there.
Because of vision face to face, the saints
In Eden's inner temple live of love,
And hate is left to perish at the gate.
The radiance streaming from rewarding eyes
Bars every pathway to escape from love;
And like a despot queen, love rules with might,
Where beauty as a king usurps full sway.
In exile here, our vulgar eyes are held;
We cannot see as see God's closer friends,
And blindness to the glory rampant there
Is measure of our baneful freedom here
To hate or love. To shake this curse of kind,
And slip to bondage the elect enjoy,
We must the God of splendor closer view,
And from creation's book of wonders pluck
A larger notion of His attributes.
In spite of primal scars that seam its face,
This earth bears title to admiring praise,
Betraying touches of the artist hand
That paved its floor with flowers of every hue,
And hanging gardens in its ceiling set.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

The sunrise, and the sunset, and the clouds;
The seasons four, the breath of softer spring,
The golden summer, winter's silver cold,
And red ripe autumn, are but voices meant
To lift devouter minds to thought of God.
Whatever thing of beauty earth can boast,
From Venus Phidias wrought in Parian Stone,
To mother-love and father-sacrifice,
From childhood's innocence to peace of age,
Is but a spark that borrows fire and light
From beauty's central sun, the God of all.
Effects have previous being in their cause,
Created excellences owe their birth
To God's creative might, and nought exists
Without its type in God's capacious mind.
And hence it follows that the single good,
Embracing all, and able of itself
To fill the human heart and leave desire
Without a want, is God, and God alone.
What folly then to cleave to lesser things,
To feed voracious hearts with crumbs of good,
When loaves of plenty are within our reach!
And every sin we do is folly such.
We never tie our loves to painted gauds
That passion offers, but we damn them straight
To gruesome process of starvation's death.
And so the circle runs its golden round.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

What makes our future home the seat of bliss
Alone can crowd our exile with delight.
And God's absorbing presence, barriers broke,
Must leap the intervening air, and speed
Athwart the haze of earth what vision light
Enslaves to joy the hearts of saints in Heaven.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

INTRODUCTION

I

Good friends, if God walked through our street,
Each home a daily visit paid,
To heal the heart-hurts sorrow made,
With oil and wine of converse sweet;
If in the garb of pilgrim meek,
From door to door He made His way,
To cure the sick, all pain allay,
And dry the tears on each child's cheek;
Nay, more; if myriad spirit bands,
And saints about the light white seat
Bore earthward down on pinions fleet,
For diverse towns in diverse lands;
If angels toiled afield with men
To clear wet brows of midday glow;
If angels watched our women sew,
And helped the young to play; what then?
Why, things would wear another mien,
And Death would prove too weak a thing
To carry captive to their King,
Men's souls enamoured of the scene.

II

We've built us ships to cross the seas,
We've space annihilated quite;
If life were worth so stout a fight,
Who knows but what we'd kill disease?
Disease is not omnipotent;
Our weakness is, perhaps, its strength.
What whittles down our years in length?
Disgust with years already spent.
Men cursed with carcasses like ours,
On history's initial page,
At age we call a green old age,
Are rated infants yet in hours.
Our ways in pleasant places cast,
We'd rummage lands and find, in sooth,
The fountain of perpetual youth;
Or failing, tie up Death so fast,
His scythe from out his hands would slip;
We'd drag him to earth's summit top
And pitilessly let him drop
Through gloom, whose depths to Nowhere dip.
And Death would be no more! Ah, yes!
But can you estimate the loss?
What spectres of fatigue would cross
Our lengthened shadows, can you guess?

I would not have old Death to die!
Small harm befall his snowy locks!
I love him as the friend who knocks,
To bid me forth to eternity.

III

If God as pilgrim walked the streets,
If angels helped make merry din;
Our highways still would reek with sin,
Men's souls would melt with passion's heats.
Red Calvary whispers Deicide;
The Jews who had more faith than we
Nailed Christ upon the gibbet-tree;
And God lay dead, when Jesus died.
Methinks the traitor Judas reck
Some sons among the sons of men;
More Pharisees live now than then,
With harder hearts and stiffer necks.

IV

Besides, our eyes were never meant
For joyance in this grosser air;
Beatitude, estranged from care,
Alone can make our souls content.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

When flawless Beauty's flawless parts
Their image on our vision fling;
When death has cut in twain the string
That straitens now our love-sick hearts;
When glory's miracle has wrought
These orbs of flesh to spirit-orbs;
When Deity unveiled absorbs
Man's big capacity for thought;
Then is the season foreordained,
For payment of deferred wage;
Then Christ shall crown the brow of age
With diadem hope's patience gained.

ATHEISM

v

We're in the shadow land of strife,
Awaiting for the mists to lift
And mingle with the azure drift
That borders t'other side of life.
Faith knows not; she can but believe;
Belief's the badge of weaker years;
And reason's courage falls to tears
When meshed in webs it can't unweave.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

Because it savors sweet to pride,
Some fools of men hug theories,
As swift begetting sharp unease,
As when the third of Heaven lied.
They cannot shoot the darts of thought
Beyond the bounds their Maker set;
They lay about, they worry, fret,
And last deny that God is aught.
And if some whispered doubt ascend
(God's love is stronger than unfaith)
They stifle dead the angel wraith,
And into deeper hells descend.

VI

How hot a curse lights on the head,
To age-old creed adopt too proud!
Disdaining what he terms the crowd,
He hobnobs with the beasts husk-fed.
Impatient under check and rule,
He breaks the bonds that render wise;
He wakes some morning, rubs his eyes,
And counts himself an arrant fool.
He left the path right reason goes,
In search of wisdom, something worth;
The laughing-stock of error's mirth,
For all his pains now nothing knows.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

His life is one colossal doubt;
He feeds his mind forbidden food,
And humors every baser mood
To shut the spectral future out.
Abroad he shifts to hide the gloom
That tracks him to his study lone;
The arch-fiend always helps his own
Until they shuffle to the tomb.

VII

Sin seasons fuel for furnace hell,
The fires God's anger feeds burn brisk;
This craven doubter braves the risk
And travels—whitherward? Ah, well;
Were pains eternal what they seem
To prophets of these latter days,
Uncertain something hid in haze,
With which their wild vagaries teem;
The odds at stake should rein them in—
Men betting money on a race,
Their wagers with more prudence place,
Than such as doubt of hell—and sin!
And God's own mind cannot conceive
A crime of darkly deeper brew
Than deed these blatant scoffers do
When boasting that they'll not believe.

VIII

But an they must, why, let them die!
Our warning's but a feeble voice;
They've made irrevocable choice,
And where the tree falls, let it lie!
Grace wasted on them all her arts,
Saints wore their very knees in prayer;
Nor you nor I can hope or dare
To rival grace subduing hearts.
Nor you nor I can seal our prayers
With record of a life clean kept;
The tears for unbelievers wept
Outweigh a world of souls like theirs.
And yet omnipotent of will,
These rend a Heart already broke;—
God spoke,—the sleeping dead awoke;
God thunders, and these slumber still.
Our message word is Heaven sent:
This way lies life, that way lies death;
The Lord can stifle all your breath,
He can't close hell, towards which you're bent.

IX

We purpose not to measure swords
With hypocrite bereft of sense,
Who dares to mock omnipotence;
His ribald blasphemy affords

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

An hour or two of demon play
 To easy dupes, who line his purse
 With greasy shekels, sit and curse
The night through, with hell's coryphée.
The owl that mopes when moons are new
 Beneath the sun falls wholly blind;
 When man whips God from out his mind
Truth dons a mask of inky hue.
The mole is cozier in the dark;
 Then let him burrow to his taste
 And batten on earth's refuse waste;
And let his fellows rind and bark
Of wormwood pleasure grind and gnaw;
 Their future lot they know full well;
 God never yet sent fools to hell,
And God can sanction all His law.

X

It likes me not as well as you
 To cut the throat of meaner self.
 Think you that saints, while scorning pelf,
Knew not what wonders gold can do?
And youths and maids, who sealed and vowed
 The rare possession of their hearts,
 Once nurtured honey-sweetened smarts
Too subtle for your brutish crowd.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

Why prate you of the hallowed ties,
Stout heroes snapped for God, and wept?
Alas! the soul your crib who kept,
Was but a monster in disguise.
The babe that ne'er heard Jesus sung,
Or heard Him sung in sceptic tone,
No higher love, methinks, has known
Than beasts afield lend to their young.
Such babes are vipers, destined yet
To propagate a fouller brood,
And cram with venom's poisoned food
The precious progeny they get;
To suck from Fury potion fell,
To after sting the wretch to death,
Who nursing breathed unfaith for breath,
And elbow her for room in hell.
What know your crew of virtue's smile?
What know they of the purest good,
Inherent in true motherhood?
Their very lips the word defile.

XI

But such, ah well! as heard the call
That can no rival love abide,
And past the strength of nature tried
To make a holocaust of all;

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

Of home and childhood's patron saint,
Of all the innocent young hopes
That clustered starlike up the slopes
To centre Heaven, where hope fell faint;
Such know, in sooth, the pang it cost,
These instincts virgin-pure to spurn;
To altars wreck, and overturn
What idols in their pathway crossed.
Such heroes haggle not with Him,
Who Heaven left, their souls to save;
Who wrung His Heart, their hearts to lave,
And clear the image sin made dim.

XII

Ye mother saints, who sit and count
The battle buffets of a son;
Who number proud the crowns he won,
From watch-towers on the holy mount;
Tell ye these sentimental liars,
What sweets from sorrow-blossoms spring;
Tell them what memories hang and cling
To wraiths of unfulfilled desires,
When God in Heaven says them nay,
And grace, disrobing them of harm,
Bedecks them with a borrowed charm,
And works her will some hidden way.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

Tell them the worth of hero-pain,
 When wet with blood drops from the cross,
 When once the seed of seeming loss
Is grown to everlasting gain.
The learning of the schools exhaust,
 Still sacrifice to love is life;
 When God as high-priest plies the knife,
Man's heart is fittest holocaust.

HERESY

XIII

I know not whom God hates more deep,
 These wholesale murderers of truth,
 Whose lying tongues and cruel ruth
Nerve moral suicides to leap
Down steeps that dip to tireless fire,
 The pride of rebel spirits lit;
 Or coward heretics, who sit
And whittle faith to smirched desire;
Who graze along the narrow edge
 'Twixt field of good and field of ill;
 With cockle-sin their bellies fill,
And for excuse God's word allege.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

Such triflers fit well with the thought,
Wise Solomon a mystery clips,
“The bawd who eats, and wipes her lips,
And says, what evil have I wrought?”

XIV

I can be patient with the son
Who trips and falls, but with regret;
Who wounds a mother's heart, and yet
Bewails the evil he has done.
I pity sinners, such by force
Of tempter's iron-studded thong,
Who still acknowledge all the wrong,
And weep their stipend of remorse.
Their hands are foul, their hearts are right,
They crawled behind no hideous lie;
They're men enough at least to try,
And failing, scorn to God indict.
Though weak, they know what sinews hide
With mercy in man's meed of grace;
They recollect that face to face
With hell, the odds are on their side.

XV

But cravens of a meaner kind,
Too selfish fond of things attaint,

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

Yet fearful of their unrestraint,
Fall to and prostitute their mind.
Pretending still to find excuse
For deeds that tinge the cheek with shame,
They impudently lay the blame
To gifts designed for holier use.
Man's zest for things by conscience banned,
They reckon meant to license sin;
They preach that reining passion in,
Frustrates an end our Maker planned.
But saints, whose views were sealed with sign,
More sure than any these can boast,
Stout battle did with passion's host,
And fought their way to peace's shrine.
Saints held and hold each impulse lent
For holy purpose; some, designed
To test the mettle of man's mind,
And trampled, shorten banishment.

XVI

Who hate the toil of self-control,
Implied in liberty of will,
To keep the dogs of conscience still,
These brutify the human soul;

Complacent fold their scarlet hands,
And heavenward roll their rheumy eyes,
To thank the god, pound-penny wise,
Who freedom tied with iron bands;
Then bade his slaves work out their fate,
And choose where choice is out of reach,
Predestining beforehand each
To everlasting love or hate.

XVII

Nay, more: to emphasize belief
In idleness of honest work,
A text or two with quip and quirk
They cite, to prove some villain thief
As pure within as are the just,
Who lead a life not of the earth;
Reducing all man's moral worth
To a vague something misnamed trust;
A faith or hope, whate'er it be,
Supplanting all the maxims taught
By Him, whose blood our birthright bought,
Whose language unmistakably
Marks off for men the golden rules
That can alone procure them rest.
This knowledge locked within their breast,
With all the hardihood of fools

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

These prophets cut a primrose path
To left of Christ's encrimsoned mile;
Such leaders make the demons smile,
And furnish fuel to God's just wrath.

XVIII

With art of pettifogging seers
They handle what is sacredest;
They conjure artificial rest,
A-piping tunes to maudlin ears.
Despair's unfounded confidence
Is creature of their coward fear;
They half believe, and what is queer,
That half is comforting to sense.
Superior pity's dole of sighs
They proffer to misguided zeal
In monks, who thought the spirit's weal
Lay in the body's sacrifice.
They vote the Baptist's coat of skin
Delusion and a thankless care;
The hermit's meagreness of fare
They count a madman's horrid sin.
They piece the texts that pamper ease;
What texts run counter to their sloth
They thrust aside, or nothing loath,
Read into Scripture what they please.

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

No higher court exerts control
O'er whims that cross each little mind;
God's message to the weak and blind
Shifts with the four winds of the soul.
Their hopes, their fears, their love, their hate,
Interpret truth eternal —Bah!
Let thieves interpret common law,
How long will justice rule the State?

XIX

Why, here at home, where all are kings,
Where suffrage parcels out the crowns,
We are not grown as yet the clowns,
To think that each must manage things.
We have a code, and in disputes
We seek the court of last resort,
Whose judgment cuts all quarrels short,
Irrevocably settling suits.
There's one tribunal in the land
Whose word no interference brooks;
Think you the nation's statute-books
More difficult to understand
Than sacred page, where light but blinds
With mysteries baffling heart and head?
Or think you God to truth that dead,
He set no guide for finite minds?

With honest heart and open eyes
Think you that contraries are true?
This, truth for me; and that, for you;
That Truth Himself to some tells lies?

XX

I have no quarrel with the flocks
These hireling shepherds lull to sleep;
And God has coals enough to heap
On teachers, who are stumbling blocks.
One word of counsel, ere we part:
Man's mind is sure, his will's at fault;
When doubts assail you, call a halt;
And, good my friends, look to your heart!
God soon or late will stand and knock;
He visits them that earnest seek;
And when His breath is on your cheek,
The doorway of your heart unlock.
He'll set you 'mong the chosen few,
The Church He styles His one true fold,
The Church as is our era old,
The only Church Saint Peter knew.
'Twill cost you pain; be stout and brave;
Wounds won for Christ are honored scars!
Christ came to kindle such like wars
Where men risk all, their souls to save.

Our other friends we love, to lose;
They live their little day, and die;
Christ loves throughout eternity;
Or one or other, we must choose!

FAITH

XXI

God's hero saints are poor and banned,
Rags are insignia of their rank;
They taste the sorrow Jesus drank,
And walk rough ways; but hold His hand!
And one sweet joy they never miss,
The inward whisper of His voice,
Who comforts them, and seals their choice
With foretaste of unending bliss;
A calm that settles on the mind,
With all the angry passions still;
The calm that stole across the hill,
Nigh Bethlehem on the dying wind.
And each recurrent Christmas night
Brings echoes of the peaceful song
To hearts bowed down by heavy wrong,
And battling hopeful for the right.

XXII

O holiest night in all the year!
O night of dreams supremely sweet!
O night when Peace and Justice meet
To kiss away the brimming tear,
Each sees in t'other's melting eye,
Each tasted all the long weeks through,
While war his brazen trumpet blew
And red Injustice watched men die!
O night when Peace and Justice part
To walk again estrangéd ways,
The day dawn of a round of days,
That knife with woe man's aching heart!
Memorial of that frosty night,
When spirit choirs on Jewry's steep
Awoke the shepherd boys from sleep
And flooded all the land with light!
When angel-thought found human tongue,
And earth-bound sense cut loose from earth;
Immortals shared creation's mirth,
And mortals heard the songs they sung!

XXIII

Since singers last from Heaven high
Aroused the drowsy flocks afield,
Long lines of raven years have wheeled
Their flight across our leaden sky.

And with the years, mayhap, there went
The innocence and candor true,
That seraph minstrels earthward drew
To comfort men in banishment.
The rounded thing, on which we crawl,
Apart from God pursues its way;
Encrusted thick with sin to-day,
Methinks, I feel it lower fall.
The age when crime submerged a world,
So clean beside our own appears,
That Pity's self could hold her tears
Were all our race to chaos hurled.

XXIV

And yet, in spite of all the harm
We've done, and still, alas! shall do,
This very hour, to false hearts true,
Christ lives, our tepid love to warm.
The stars keep eager watch to-night,
Expectant sure of mystery;
Of big event full soon to be;
My eyes are wet, and threads of light,
Web fashioned locking strand with strand,
From Heaven's corners weave and fling
Ray pathways for the Infant King
To all the altars in our land.

XXV

The surging air is loud with noise,
Of bells a-ringing tidings sweet;
And through the snow upon the street
Go singing girls and singing boys,
The maids and pages of the Child
About to visit sons of men;
These welcome Christ to earth again
With voices sin has not defiled.
I hearken to their liquid hymn,
In spirit join the vassal throng
That to the church these lead along;
With penance-joy my sight falls dim.
Oh, would that all the world were young!
Or would that age knew less of wrong!
Oh, would our hearts held one lone song,
The song that Christmas Eve heard sung!
The one thought in its every breath
Was peace with God, and peace with man;
And peace through all its lifetime ran,
And peace stood at its side in death.

XXVI

I seek the door which closes in
What chosen souls His grace engirds,
Apart from fiends that reel in herds
The night time through to lairs of sin.

The silent hush within the walls,
Of youth and age in prayer profound,
Bespeaks the still that hovers round
The vestibule to glory's halls.
And farther off, beyond the rows
Of low-bent heads, another sight!
A snow-white altar, banked with light,
Effulgence through the temple throws.

XXVII

The Mass begins! A gray-haired priest,
His soul a-tremble on his tongue,
Gives echo wing the aisles among;
And sweet-faced boys, ere echo's ceased,
Take up the strain, and make night ring
With sounds the Blesséd sit to hear,
Eternity's unending year,
Beneath the smile of glory's King.
"We cannot see," he falters out,
"The good things waiting them that love;
We cannot see the ground above;
But, God, we can't Thy mercies doubt!"
"Then lift us past the things we see,
Through raptures of this Christmas Eve;
That last our restless hearts may cleave
To loves that now our efforts flee!"

Atheism, Heresy and Faith

“And ’gainst the dawn of that glad day,
When faith to vision yields her place,
And we shall see Thee face to face,
Come down and cheer us on our way!”

“A hundred weary pilgrims kneel
To watch their Saviour born anew;
Thy word is passed, we know it true;
Then come and all Thy promise seal!”

XXVIII

He whispers to the rounded wheat,
The Christ is in his saintly hands;
Descending seraphs range in bands
For adoration at God’s feet!
A-tinkling rings the tiny bell,
The people fall to prayer more deep;
The Shepherd walks among His sheep,
Earth’s nigher Heaven, and all goes well!
O God! we thank Thee for the grace
That circles round each Christmas night;
We pray Thee, send a fuller light,
To kill unfaith from out our race.

The Bells of the Temple

SILVER JUBILEE OF WOODSTOCK COLLEGE,
WOODSTOCK, MARYLAND

And beneath at the feet of the same tunic round about, thou shalt make as it were pomegranates, of violet, and purple, and scarlet twice dyed, with little bells set between;

So that there shall be a golden bell and a pomegranate, and again another golden bell and a pomegranate.

And Aaron shall be vested with it in the office of his ministry that the sound may be heard, when he goeth in and cometh out of the sanctuary.—Exodus, xxviii, 33-35.

I

Since sound and sight in ear and eye
Are fabric of man's mind-spun thought,
Jehovah philosophic wrought,
When thus He cloaked His majesty:
A bearded priest, with sweet-faced boys,
His tunic hemmed about with bells;
A tinkling, golden clink that tells
The heart God passes in the noise.

The Bells of the Temple

A heaving dome of incense clouds,
Through which uncertain glimmer floats;
The lights of myriad taper boats
With haze of awe in all their shrouds.
God dwells not in the whirling wind,
Nor rides the wing of wild alarm;
He steals in with the subtle charm
That permeates a quiet mind.
With all five gateways of the soul
Close shut against what things of sense
Or breathe Him not, or breathe offence,
With loves and hates in tight control,
Our sorrows unto gladness cease:
Like laughing maid in Love's employ,
Sweet recollection smiles to joy,
And all goes well; for God is peace.

II

Somewhere in Fancy's inner room
A jeweled casket, pinned and locked,
Keeps sacred whispers, that have mocked
Time's bloodless touch, or slipped the tomb.
Some evening Memory turns the key;
Old age sits down to echoes hear,
That grate unwelcome on the ear,
Or flood the soul with melody:

The Bells of the Temple

The jar of speech conceived in ire,
The curse some weaker victim sent
To dog his heels with worriment,
And heap his head with hell-hot fire;
The dirge a weeping angel tolled,
When Jesus, travel stained and sore,
Knocked for admission at his door,
To die without in wet and cold;
The sobbing thanks an orphan wove,
Whose scalding tears his pity dried
That night she walked the streets, and cried,
And with her first big sorrow strove;
The plea for succor, faint and thin,
When stirred by moans of God below,
From dreams he hated to forego,
Descending down he let Him in.

III

Each people has one common heart,
Which all the nation's glory thrills,
On which the nation's heavy ills
Inflict a universal smart.
In sobbing Israel's history
No page with blacker lines is crossed,
Than page recounting how she lost
The priest and bells of mystery.

The Bells of the Temple

She opes the tome, and spells the rhyme
To which the golden tongues made song;
She wails things hid amid the throng
Of spectre-sounds in silent time.
Her grief unheartens all her men;
'Tis hopeless sad. For God is passed,
His pathway is with curses cast;
The bells—they must not ring again!
So one beside the morning sea,
Ere dawn can lift the mist-wrack dun,
Peers 'cross the waste for sailor son,
Who is not, and shall never be.

IV

But we who sit, this day of days,
To piece each music-laden breath,
Which up from alley-ways of death,
That is no death, unto us strays,
Can hear the bells, and see the priests;
Can almost touch the tuneful rims
Of tunics, sweeping hints of hymns
Down aisles of temple decked for feasts.
Faith knows no past, and things of faith
More real are than day-time dreams;
My picture is not what it seems,
An empty fancy's hollow wraith.

The Bells of the Temple

The garb of flesh they wore when men,
In graveyard yon to dust is worn.
What boots it? Are their spirits shorn
Of character, that marked them then?
We knew them then by no such sign
As brands the friendship of an hour;
Love lent their holy mien its power,
Death fused that love to love divine.

V

I follow, as they quiet walked
Along the hallway, down the stair;
Fresh from the altar ringed with prayer,
Where face to face with God they talked.
I see each busy in his cell,
To smooth, with mercy's dole of ruth,
The hillocks 'long the road to truth,
Where prouder talent tripped and fell.
I watch them mending broken hope,
With praises pushing them to try,
Who else had straight lain down to die,
Rather than in the shadows grope.
These were our heroes of the Cross,
Who died to self, if so they might
Teach strangers how to live for right,
And harvests pluck from barren loss.

The Bells of the Temple

VI

They're smiling at us through the gloom,
Their cheery voices hushed in sleep;
But ringing echoes overleap
The vaporous chaos of the tomb.
The bells upon their tunics preach;
Each golden bell of virtue's gold,
Cast in the Christ appointed mould,
Example speaks more loud than speech!
Old Aaron's priest says not a word;
The people bend as nearer come
The tinkling footfalls of the dumb;
And in man's silence God is heard.
Fall to your prayers, your heads bow down;
Do homage, ere the hour is gone,
To slow procession moving on,
Yclad in bell-embroidered gown!

VII

O sad and precious memory!
The gaps these left no time can fill;
But somewhere, on the eternal hill,
They live, and long as God shall be.
In tents of peace they know not strife
That racks us still awhile, till death
Shall on us breathe creative breath,
And thrill this clay with second life.

The Bells of the Temple

And yet the hand, that whips us thus
At bidding of a Father moves;
God chastens where He still approves,
And God will not abandon us;
He'll not stand by, and let our hopes
Slip down to pits of blind despair;
He cannot make us curse the care
With which we hugged hope up the slopes.
For in the distant, dim to be,
The wee, wee bells are ringing out,
Gold plashing our horizon doubt,
With suns we can't expect to see.

VIII

In city set upon a height,
The citadel of 'leagured men;
These wait the noise, from nether glen,
Of brothers come to fight their fight;
And rout the flocks of carrion birds
That wheel and clamor menace-moans,
To gouge their eyes out, bare their bones,
Or clap them into slave-whipped herds.
And one, a watcher in the tower,
Hoarse halloes down to reeling ghosts,
That clouds of curling dust hide hosts
Of helpers, distant but an hour!

The Bells of the Temple

Disdaining danger, up men climb
To topmost wall's exposéd verge,
And hear strange whispers upward surge,
From columns marching swift as Time.
They rub their eyes, each mad sense whirls,
For, where the road neath foliage stoops,
They seem to see advancing troops
Of singing boys and singing girls.
And to the music that these weave
March warriors matched to battle fate;
With silver buckle, ring, and plate,
Caparisoned from casque to greave.

IX

The silent foot of thievish time
To covert tomb steals our best years;
Old heads are frosted thick with fears,
And grave-moss thrives in age's rime.
The sliding sides of crag we've won
Empurpled are with life-blood's clot;
Our coward meannesses forgot,
God bless the little good we've done!
We feel too weak to clutch our arms,
When dead, perhaps our work will die;
The clouds that crowd our evening sky
Are fringed with rags of doubt-alarms.

The Bells of the Temple

X

But no! Far East, with bated breath,
New suns await the word to spring,
New rainbows o'er the old to fling,
And rescue all our hopes from death.
In thicket dawn of each new day
Recruits are sallying to the front,
Impatient for the shock and brunt
Of wars, that wore our strength away.
And snatches of their battle-rhymes,
Enweave themselves into our dreams;
They tinkle soft, each almost seems
The harbinger of temple chimes.
Memorials of what mystic sound
Engirded Aaron round about,
When going in and coming out,
He bowed men's foreheads to the ground;
Of bearded priest and sweet-faced boys,
Of tunics hemmed about with bells;
Of tinkling, golden clink that tells
The heart God passes with the noise.

XI

For thy good gifts we thank thee, God;
For crimes thy grace plucked from our thought,
Ere worser self dread havoc wrought;
For seas of sin we crossed dry-shod.

The Bells of the Temple

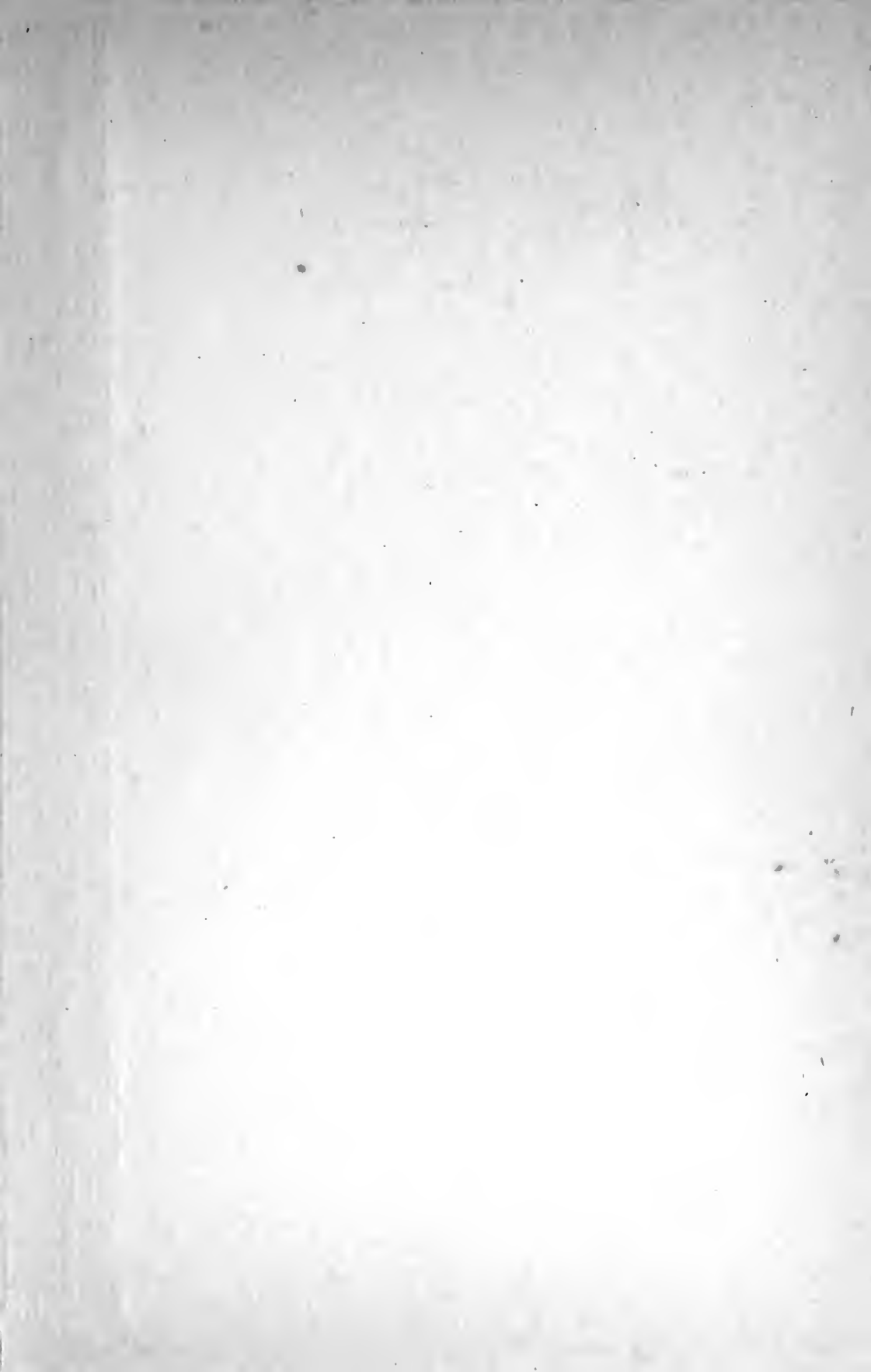
We thank thee for the days like this,
That lit at intervals our path;
These days of sorrow's aftermath,
When earth and Heaven meet to kiss;
For whispers from the fields of spring,
Where sires, who made our infancy
One endless round of minstrelsy,
To our drear winter tireless sing;
For bells, their lives a-welling out,
In far-off land of hours to be;
The burden of their madcap glee
To hope, new life; and death to doubt.
God, may our spent years' remnant days
With flowers strew our dead past's dust,
That seasons hence men may, nay, must,
In all our deeds thy mercies praise!
May years of yearning toilsome spent
Within the shadow of thy cross
Redeem those days of loitered loss
Along the ways our fathers went.
God, wreathe what hours remain of strife
With thorns from out our dead King's crown;
That so, when all the woods are brown,
We pass from death to deathless life!

THE END



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